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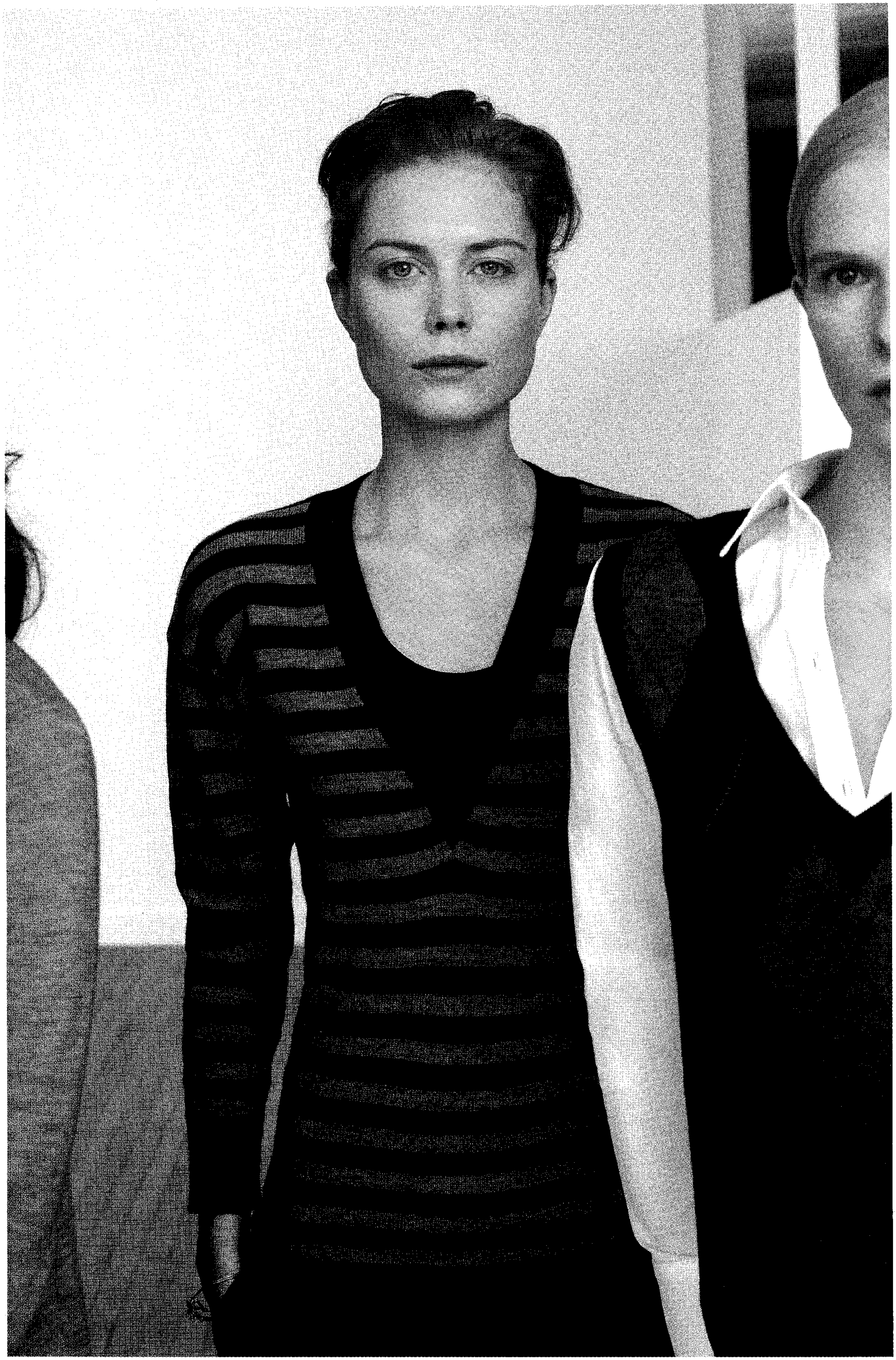

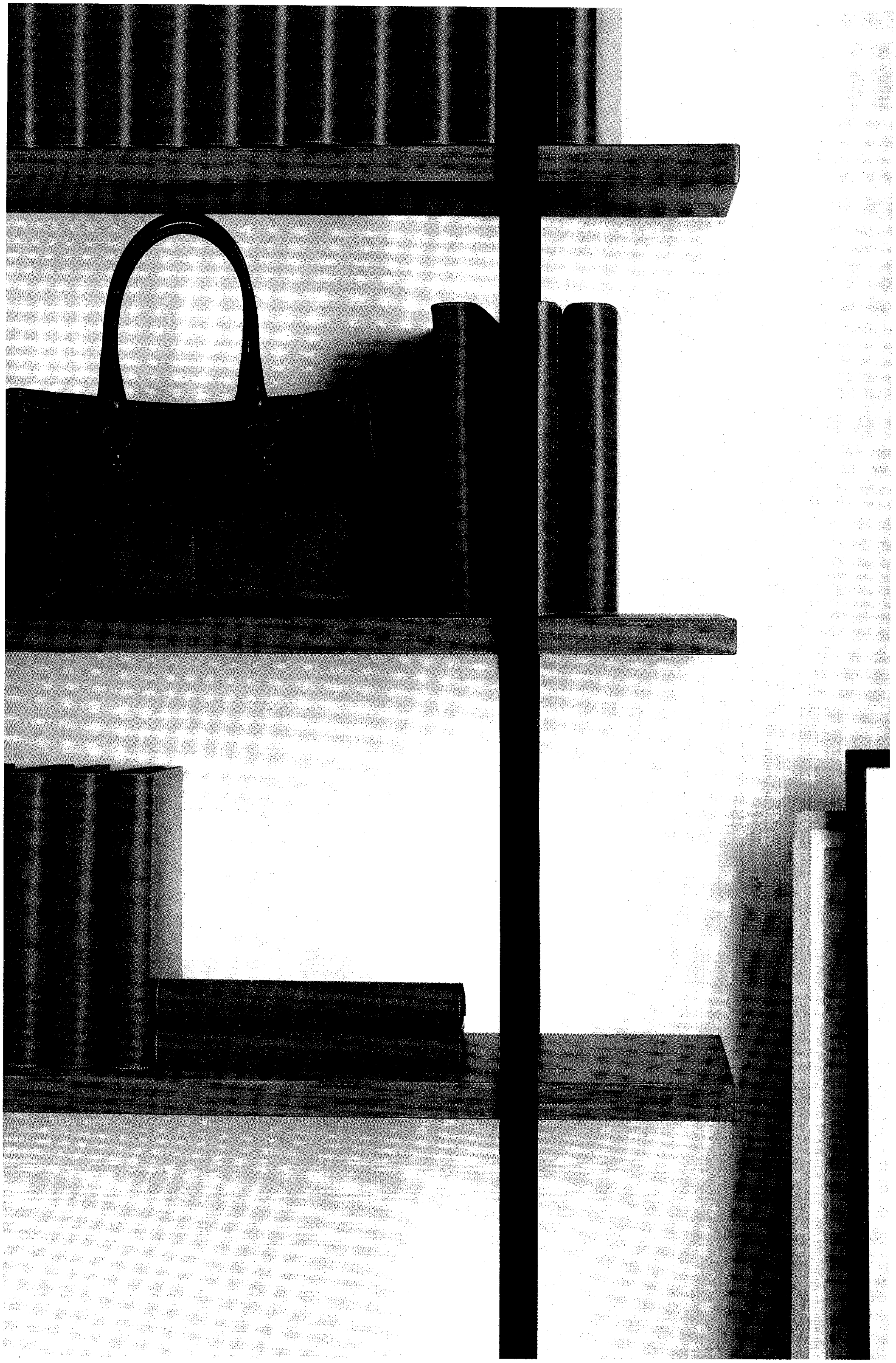

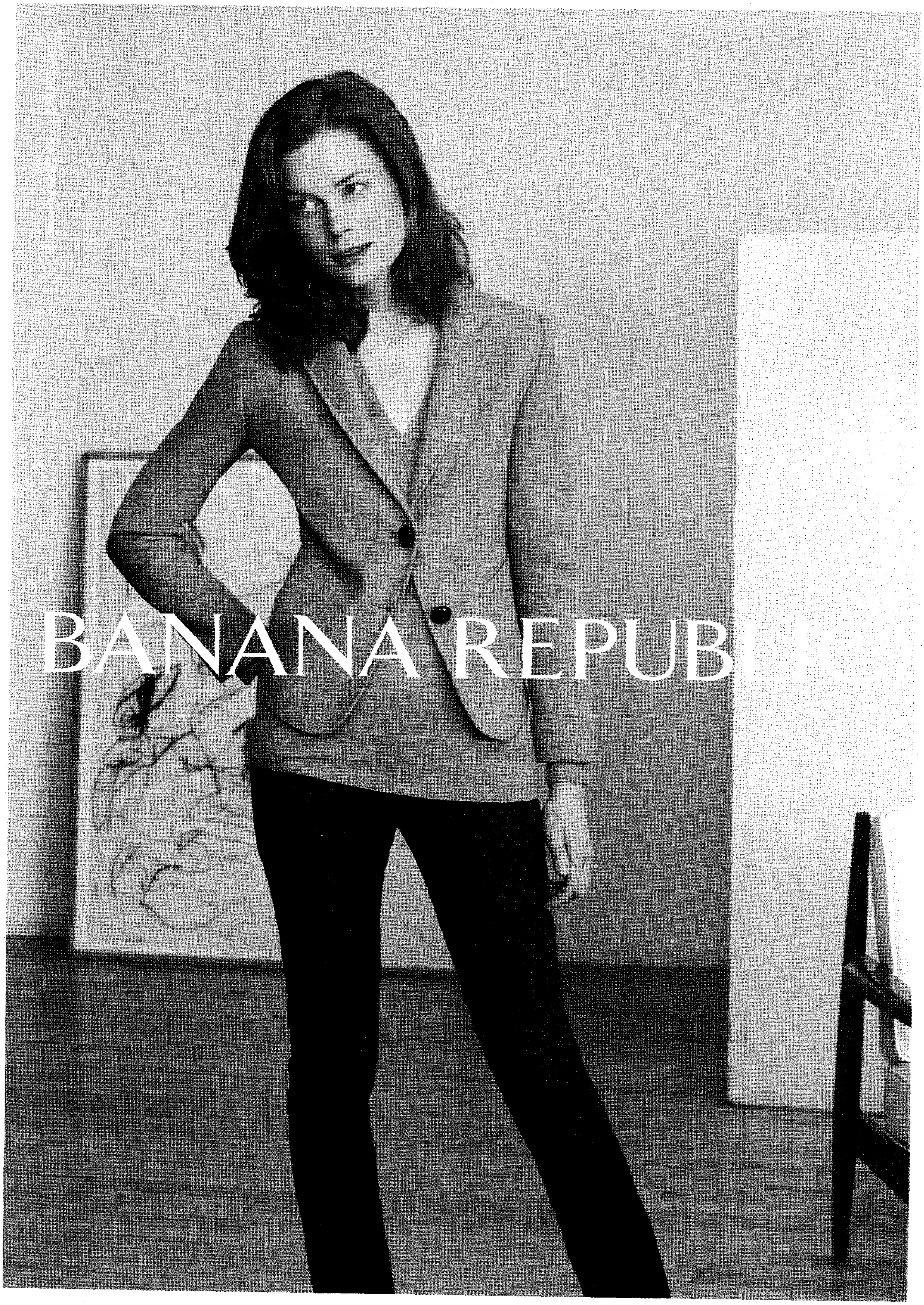
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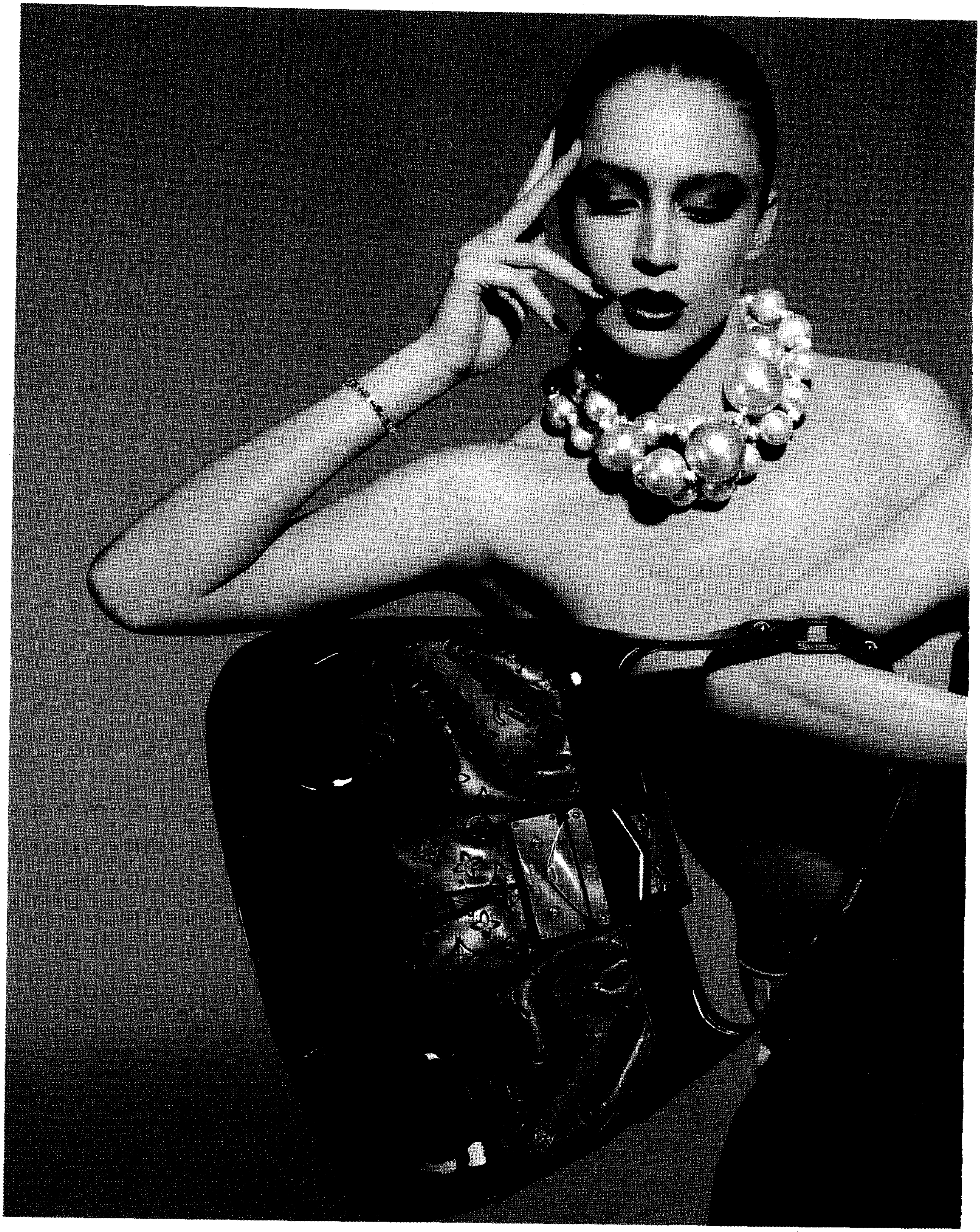

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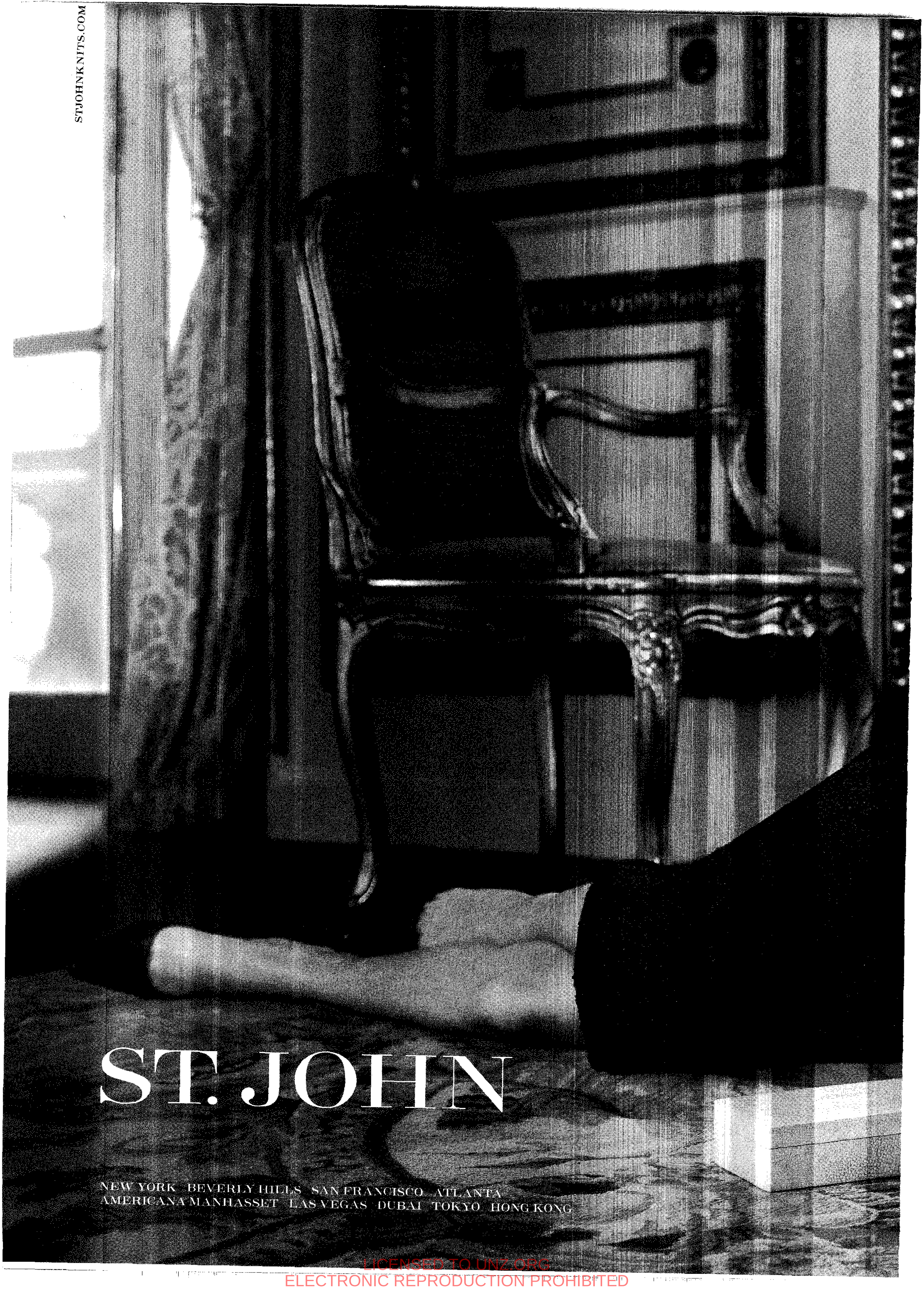
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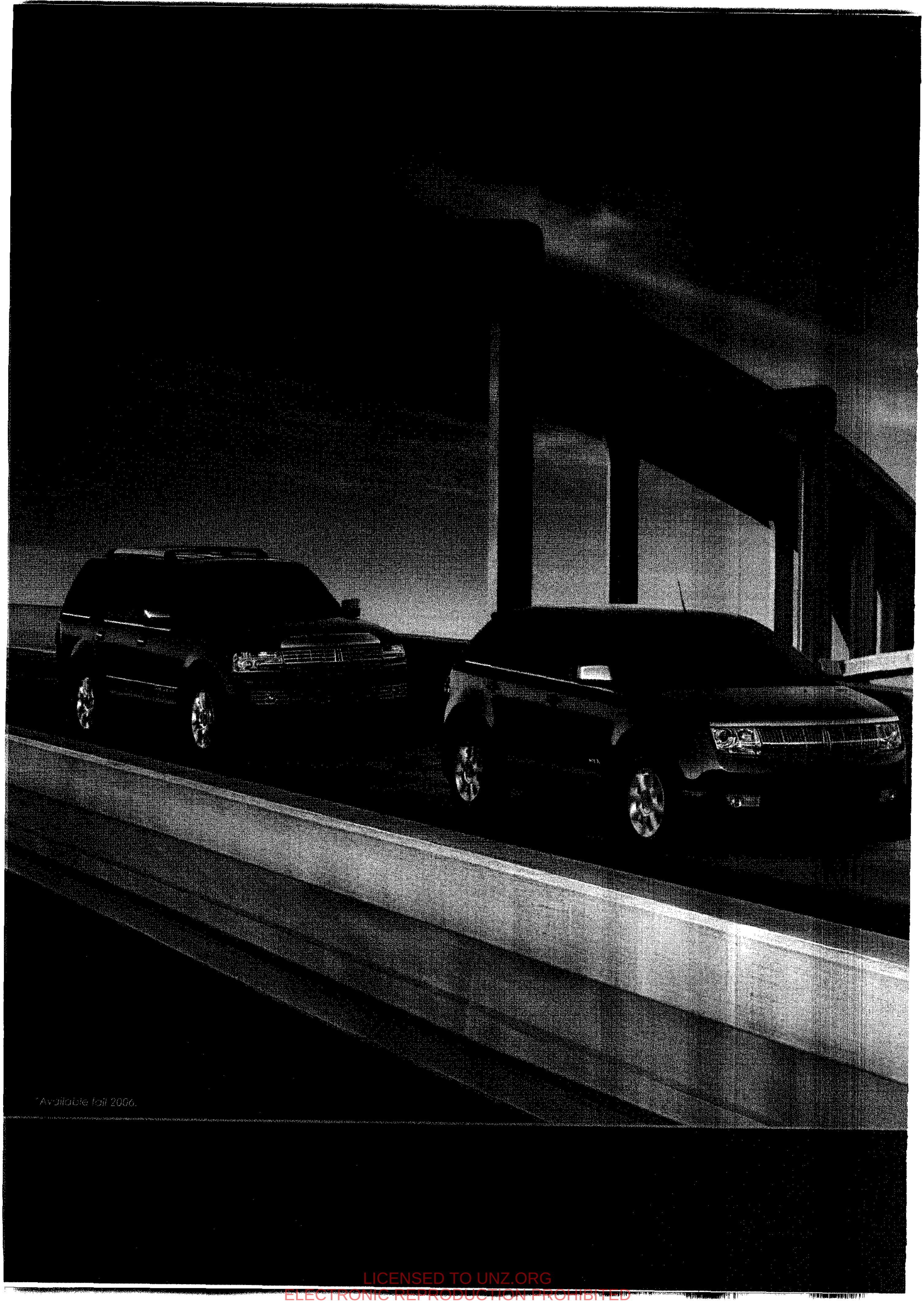

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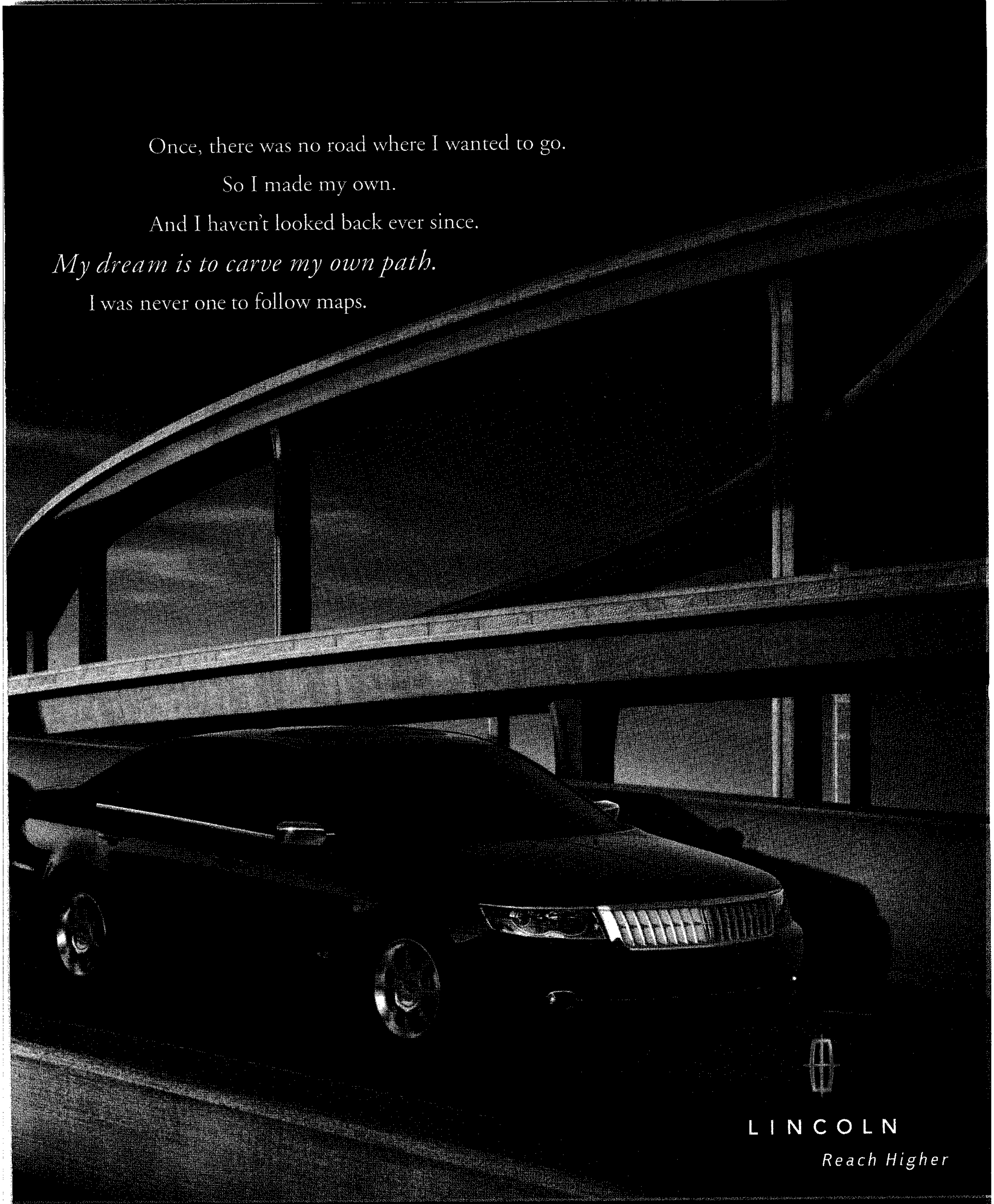
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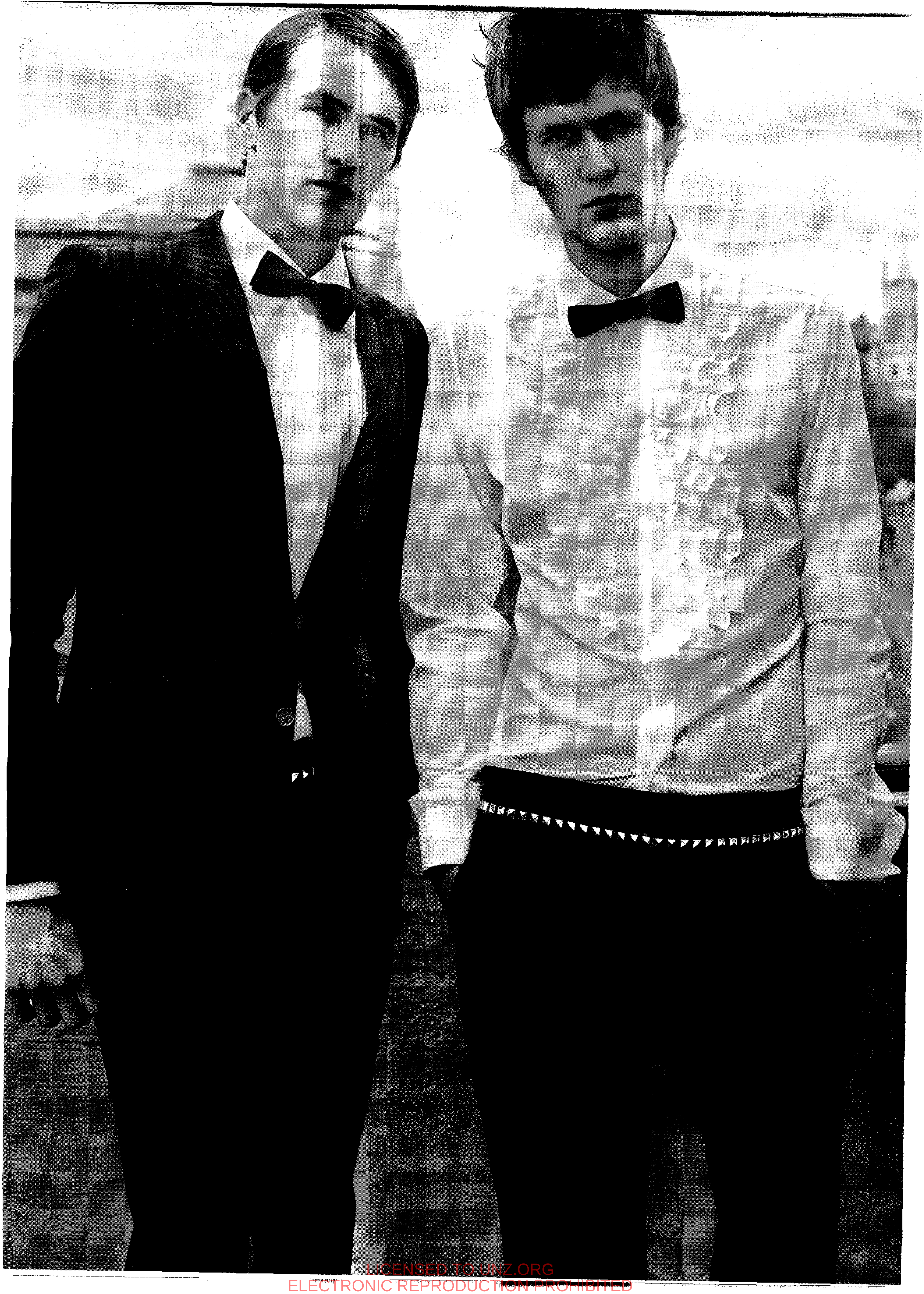

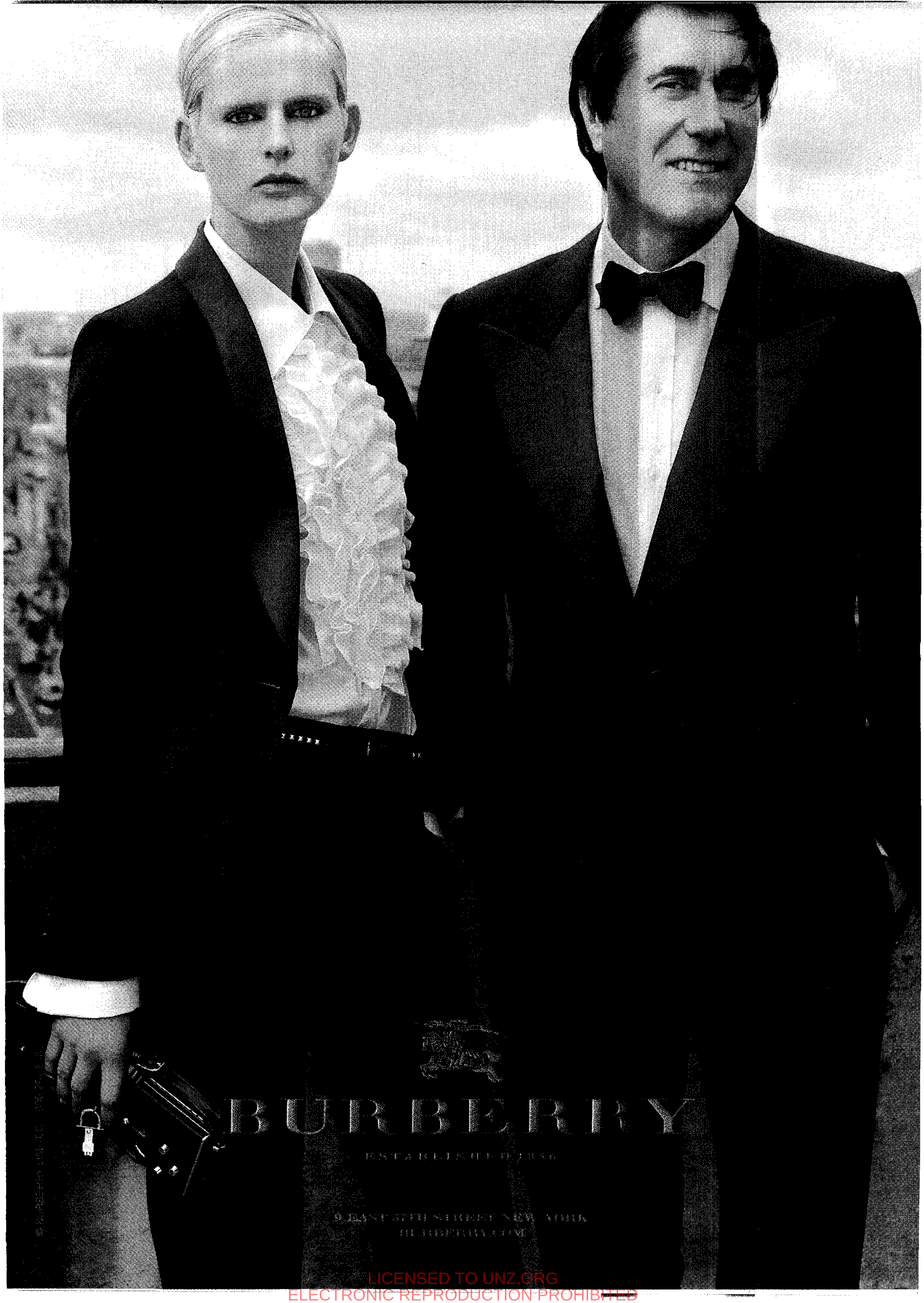
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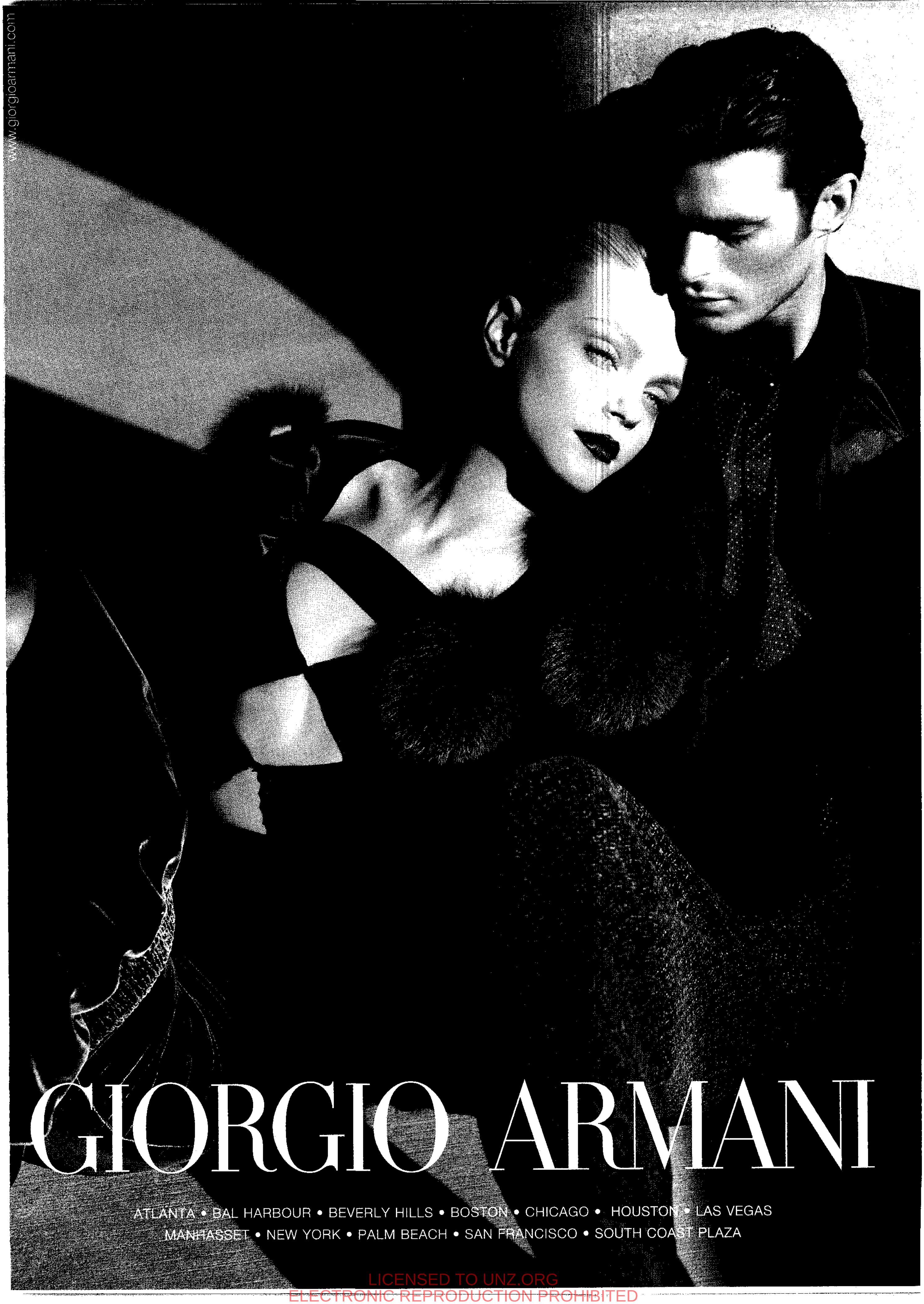
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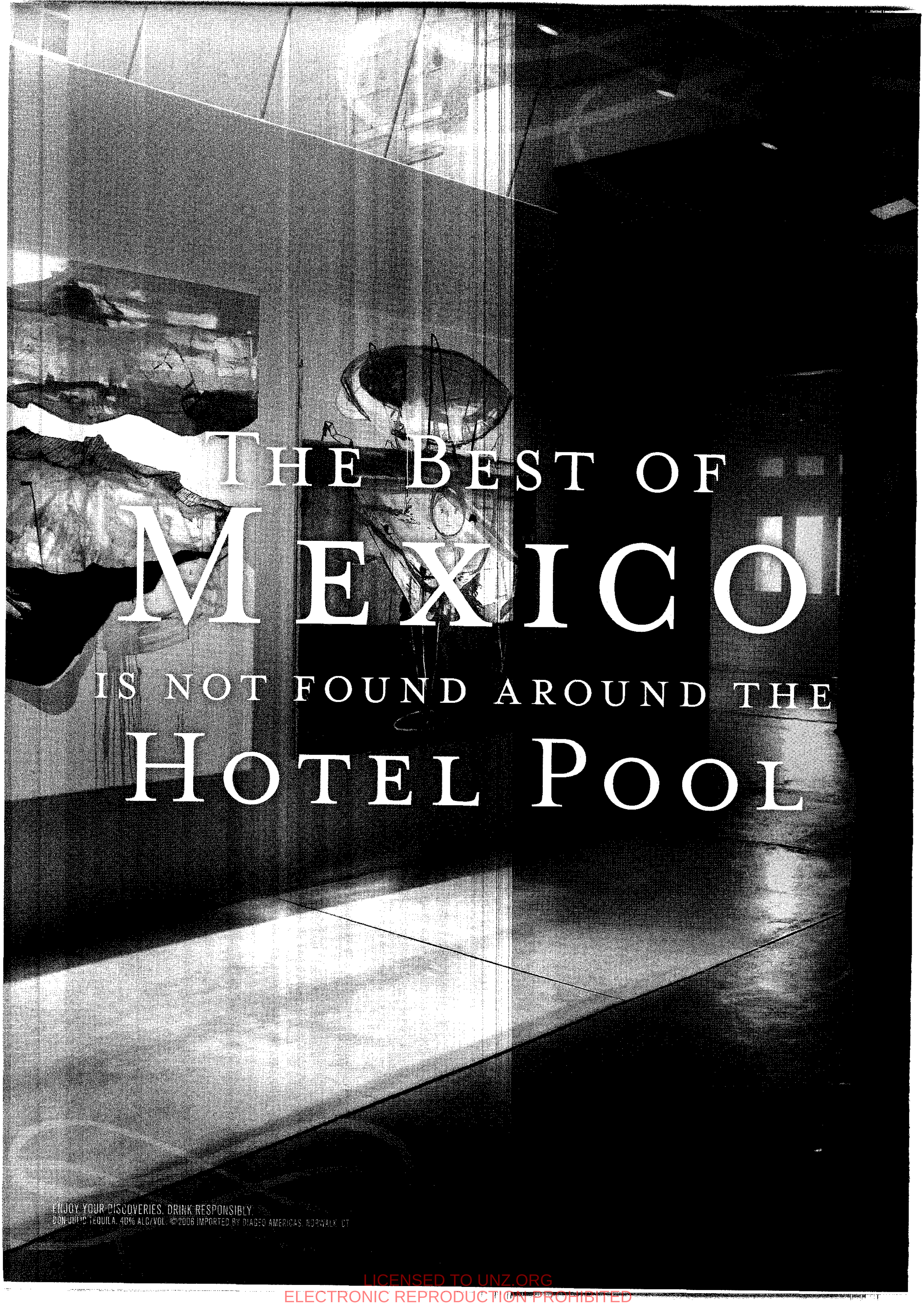
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POEMS
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Ko Un 104 "Four Poems"
Carolyn Forché 124 "The Lost Suitcase"

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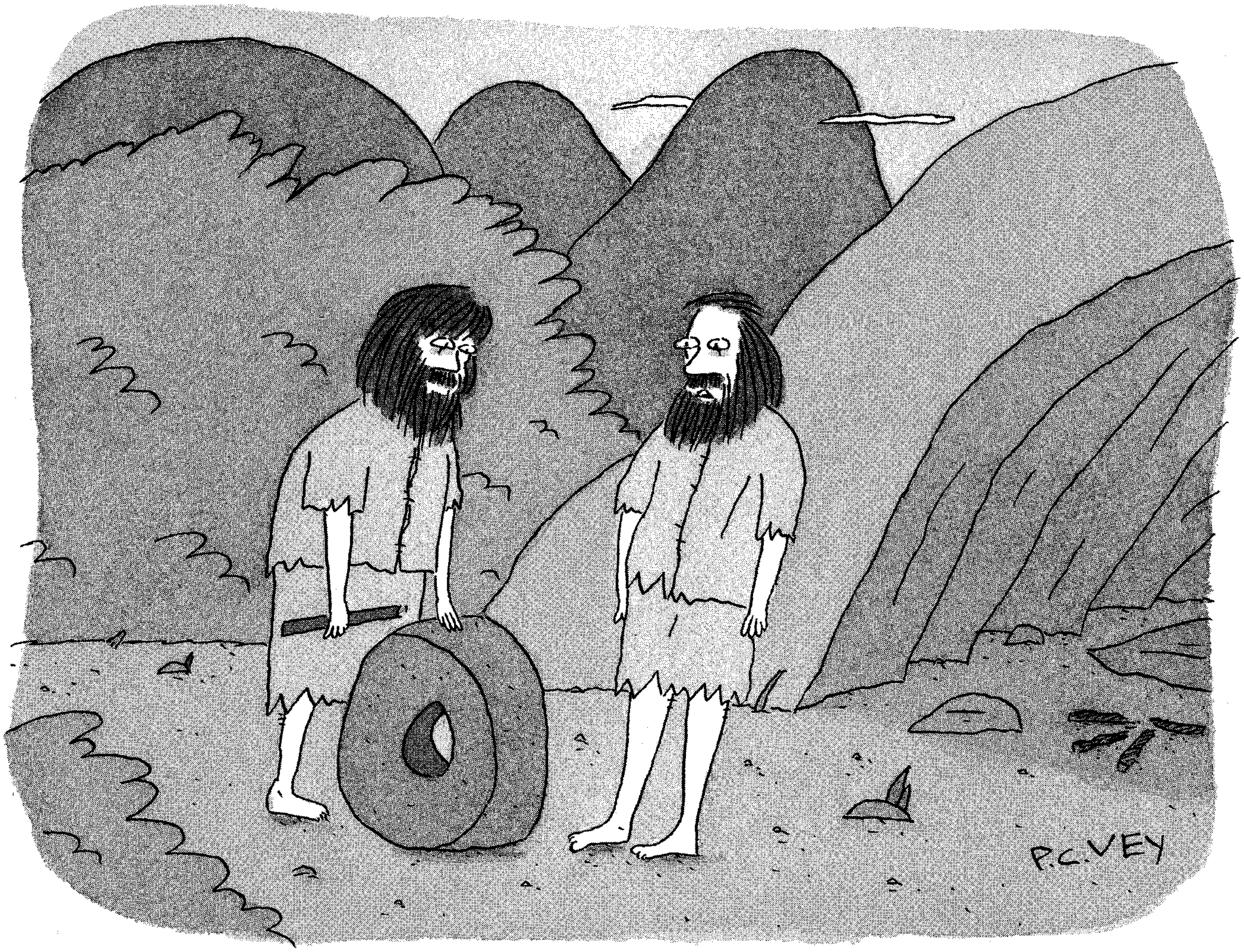
DRAWINGS *P. C. Vey, Drew Dernavich, Erik Hilgerdt, Charles Barsotti, C. Covert Darbyshire, Jason Patterson, Roz Chast, Julia Suits, Victoria Roberts, Harry Bliss, William Hamilton, Robert Mankoff, David Sipress, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Leo Cullum, Jack Ziegler, Zachary Kanin*

SPOTS *Jacques de Loustal*



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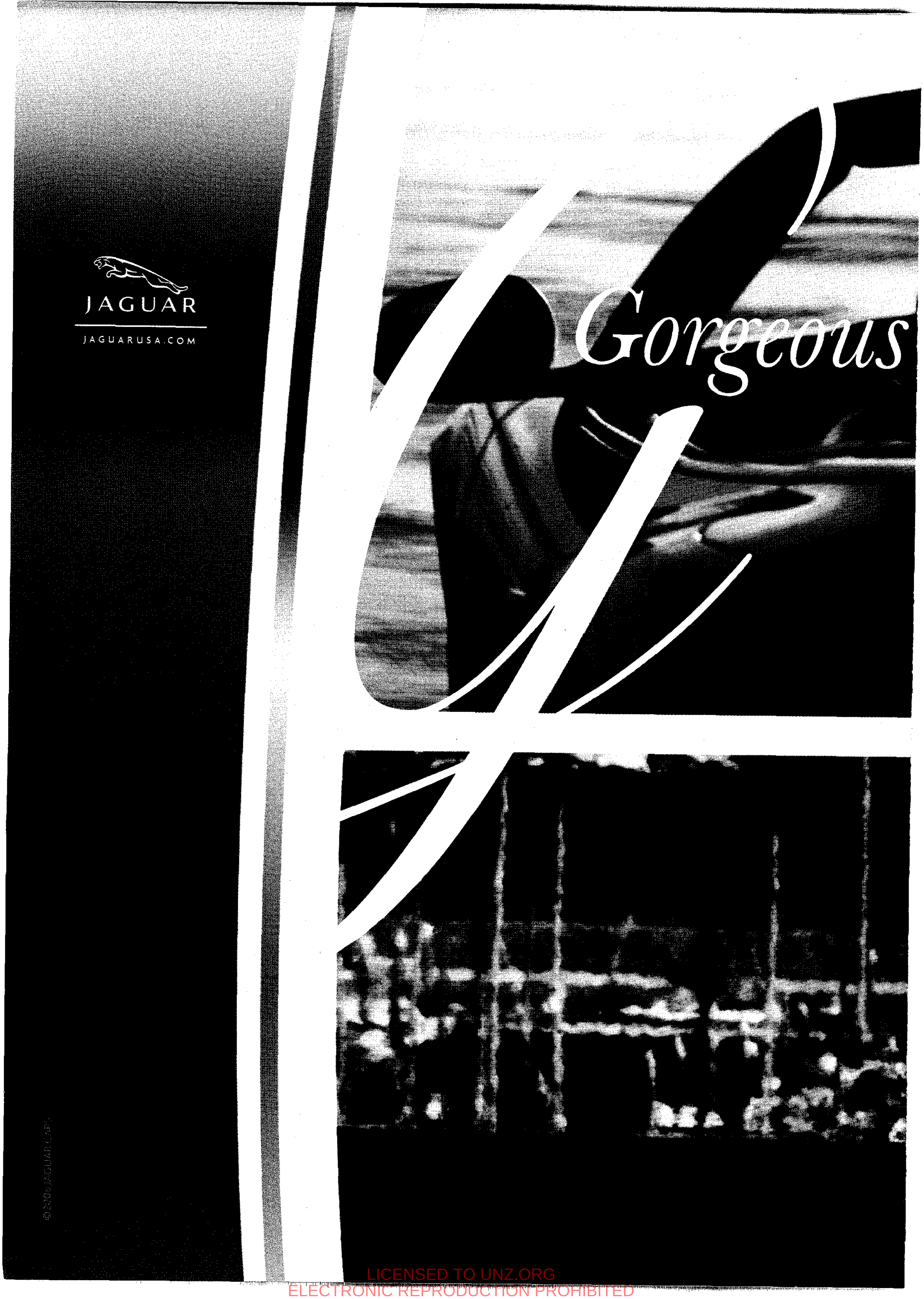

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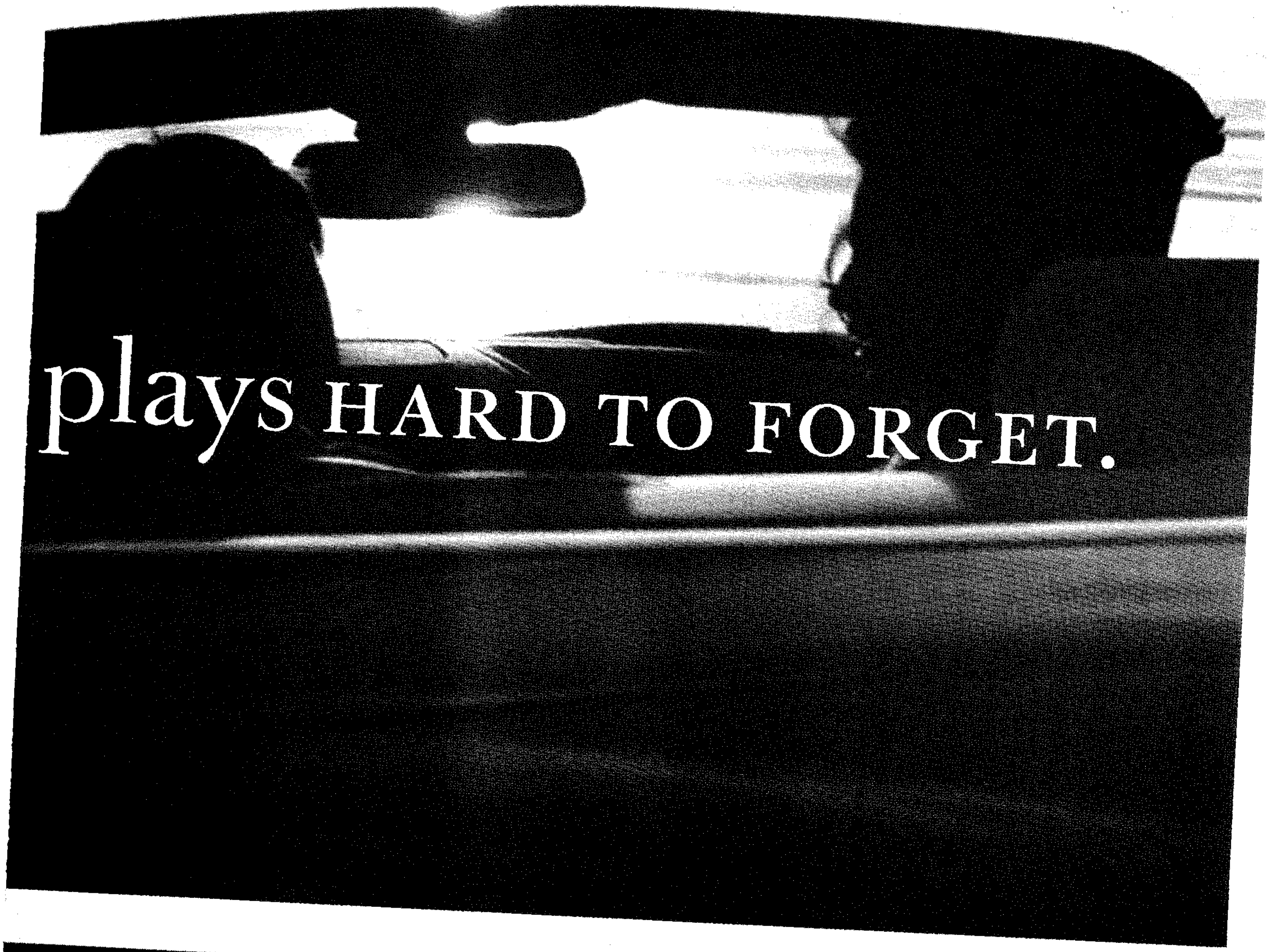
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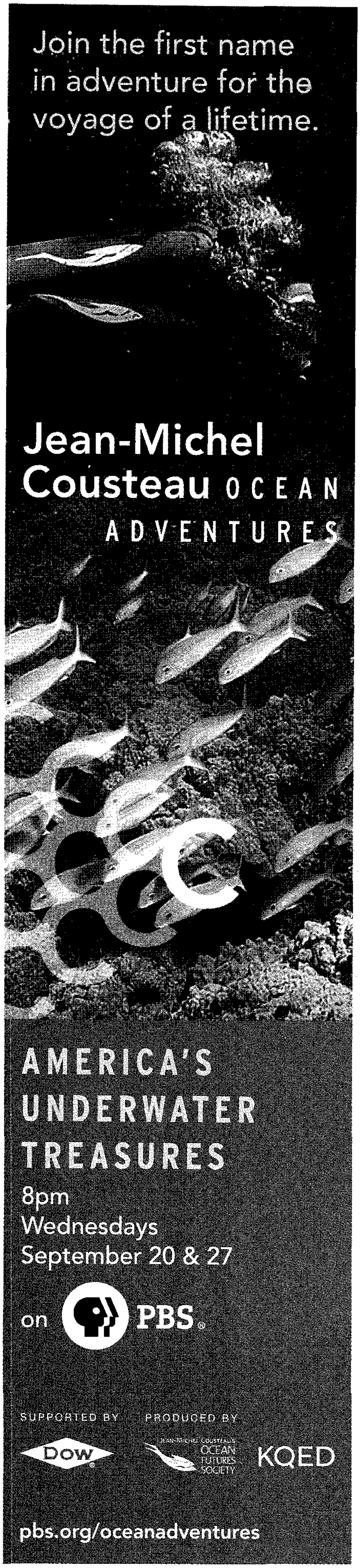
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CONTRIBUTORS

Larissa MacFarquhar ("The Huntress," p. 114) is a staff writer.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 61) is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change."

Patricia Marx ("Cool Enough for School," p. 70) writes for film and television. Her novel "Him Her Him Again The End of Him" will be published in January.

Andrea Lee ("Bag Lady," p. 80) is the author of "Lost Hearts in Italy," a novel, which came out in June.

Calvin Trillin ("Rag Time," p. 92) published "A Heckuva Job: More of the Bush Administration in Rhyme," in May.

Ko Un (Poems, p. 104) is the author of numerous books of poems, essays, and fiction in Korean. A collection of his poems in English translation, "Flowers of a Moment," comes out this month.

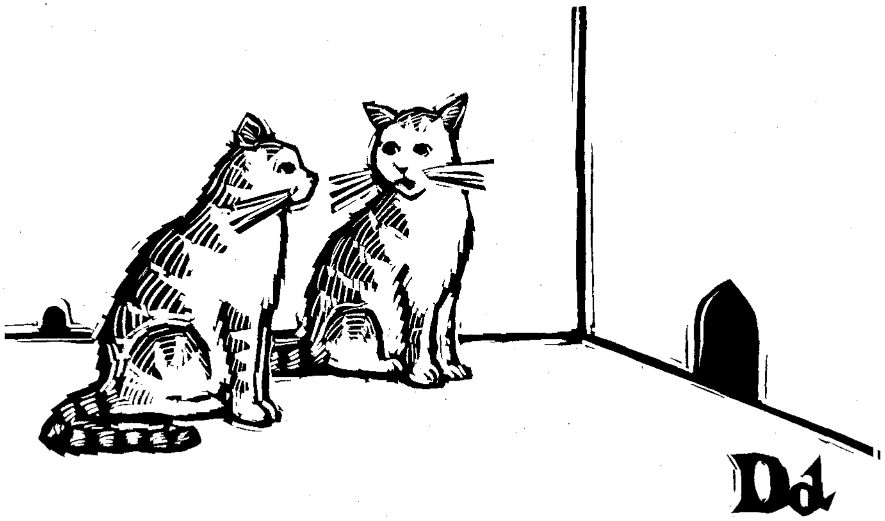
Calvin Tomkins ("I Remember MOMA," p. 126) has been writing about art and cultural affairs for the magazine for more than four decades.

Judith Thurman (A Critic at Large, p. 136) is a staff writer. A collection of her *New Yorker* essays, entitled "Cleopatra's Nose," will be published next year.

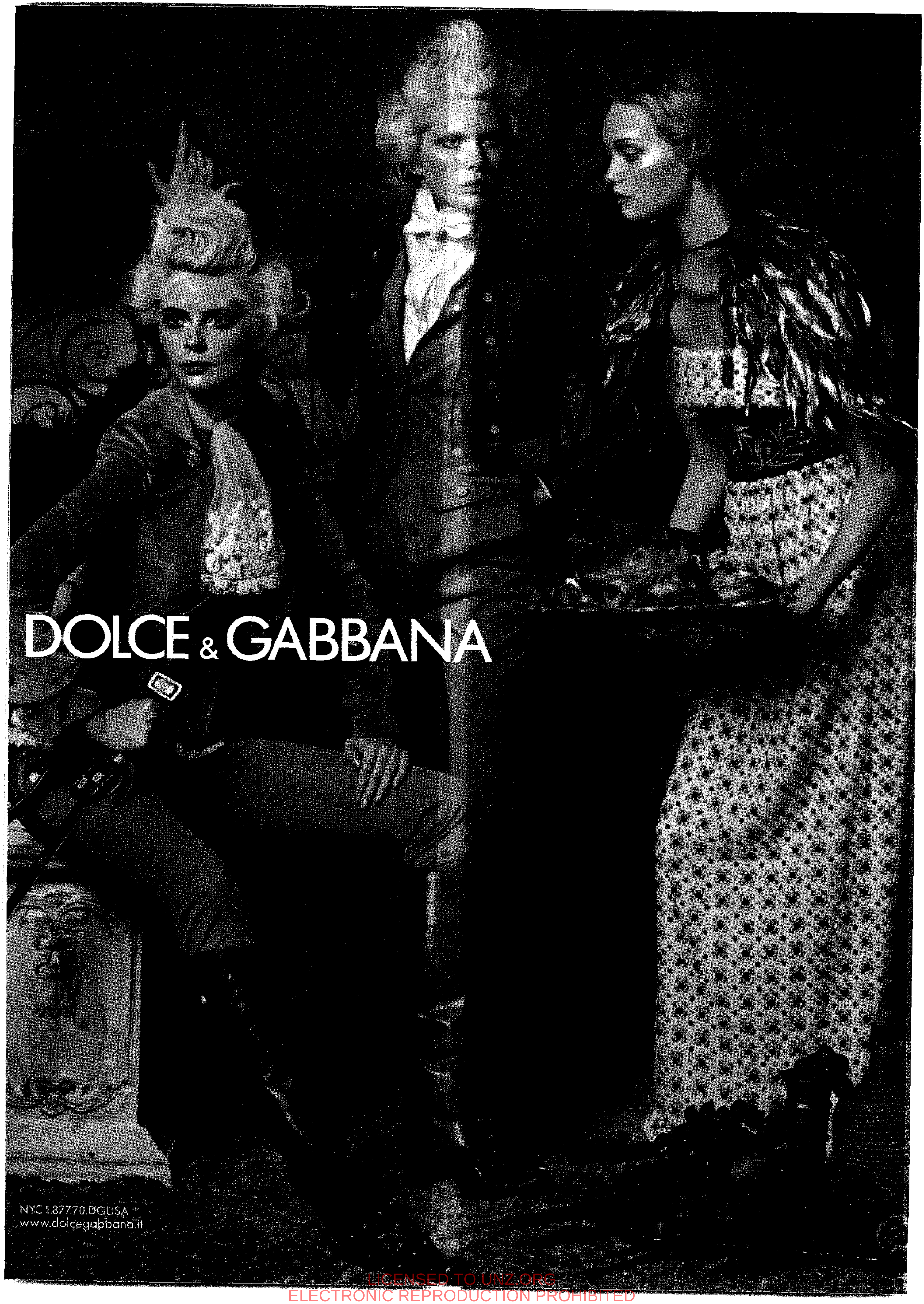
James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 68) writes a regular column on business and finance for the magazine.

Martín Espada (Poem, p. 94) has a new collection of poems, "The Republic of Poetry," coming out next month.

Henry Roth (Fiction, p. 100), who died in 1995, published his first novel, "Call It Sleep," in 1934. Two volumes of his next novel, "Mercy of a Rude Stream," were published in 1994 and 1995, and two more volumes came out after his death. "Freight" appears courtesy of the Henry Roth Literary Property Trust. ♦



"I think it's wrong to hunt them when they're in a house of worship."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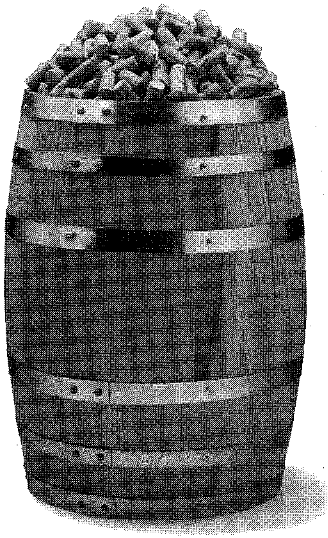

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THE MAIL

THE DEEP SPRINGS EXPERIENCE

I admired Dana Goodyear's piece about Deep Springs College and welcome the wider knowledge it will bring of the Deep Springs vision of education for leadership ("The Searchers," September 4th). It is important to note that much that may seem merely odd to the reader is part of that vision. The philosophy has three key components: academics, labor, and self-governance. The academic program is a traditional liberal-arts program, while the labor program creates a healthy contrast between the physical and the intellectual. It is hard to take one's self too seriously when shovelling cow manure. Combining academics and labor with genuine self-government in an isolated setting creates a microcosm in which the consequences of each student's actions are rapidly evident to the entire community. Classes are small; if a student doesn't do the reading, discussion suffers. Leave the wrong gate open on the ranch, and a cow could die of bloat. This unique education has produced MacArthur Fellows, numerous Truman Scholars, members of the National Academies and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a winner of the National Book Award, and business leaders, as well as many who have made the world better through lives of service—an extraordinary record for a school that graduates only a dozen students per year.

Michael Stryker
Deep Springs Class of 1964
San Francisco, Calif.

Goodyear presents Deep Springs as struggling with the dichotomy between conservatism and progressivism, with its conservative elements seeming to dominate. Yet it is possible for a college to be both conservative and progressive. For instance, many recent students and faculty consider the phrase "you came to prepare for a life of service," from L. L. Nunn's correspondence, to be the college's core mission—a transformative and progressive mission if ever there was one. Perhaps the most progressive part of Deep Springs's philosophy, however, is that every year each group of students and community members has the potential to almost totally remake the college. No other college in the country is structured in a way that allows for such a perpetually radical reënvisioning. It is a testament to the force of Nunn's original vision that so many people of such intellectual force have come to reëmbrace the college's core values and practices after much consideration, each and every year.

Oliver Morrison
Deep Springs Class of 2000
Lake Village, Ark.

The Deep Springs experience is a little like belonging to the *Partisan Review* crowd in the nineteen-fifties—it is a world where everyone is competitively smart and cares viscerally about ideas. From the outside, it may not seem like much, because even brilliant eighteen-year-olds don't know that much by the standards of a thirty-year-old. But from the inside, what counts as a formative experience is that they are creating these ideas themselves. There are few places where students are freer to follow their intellectual muses—and there is no place where they are so challenged to defend each new idea by equally smart peers. Place this experience at the threshold of adulthood, and what results is an intellectual exhilaration to which students are very much attached. I think this explains both the isolation and the weird institutional conservatism. The isolation is the sine qua non for creating an intensity that normally only results when people are swept up in a political or artistic cause. The conservatism comes from being afraid to break the spell.

Michael Pollak
Deep Springs Class of 1976
New York City

•

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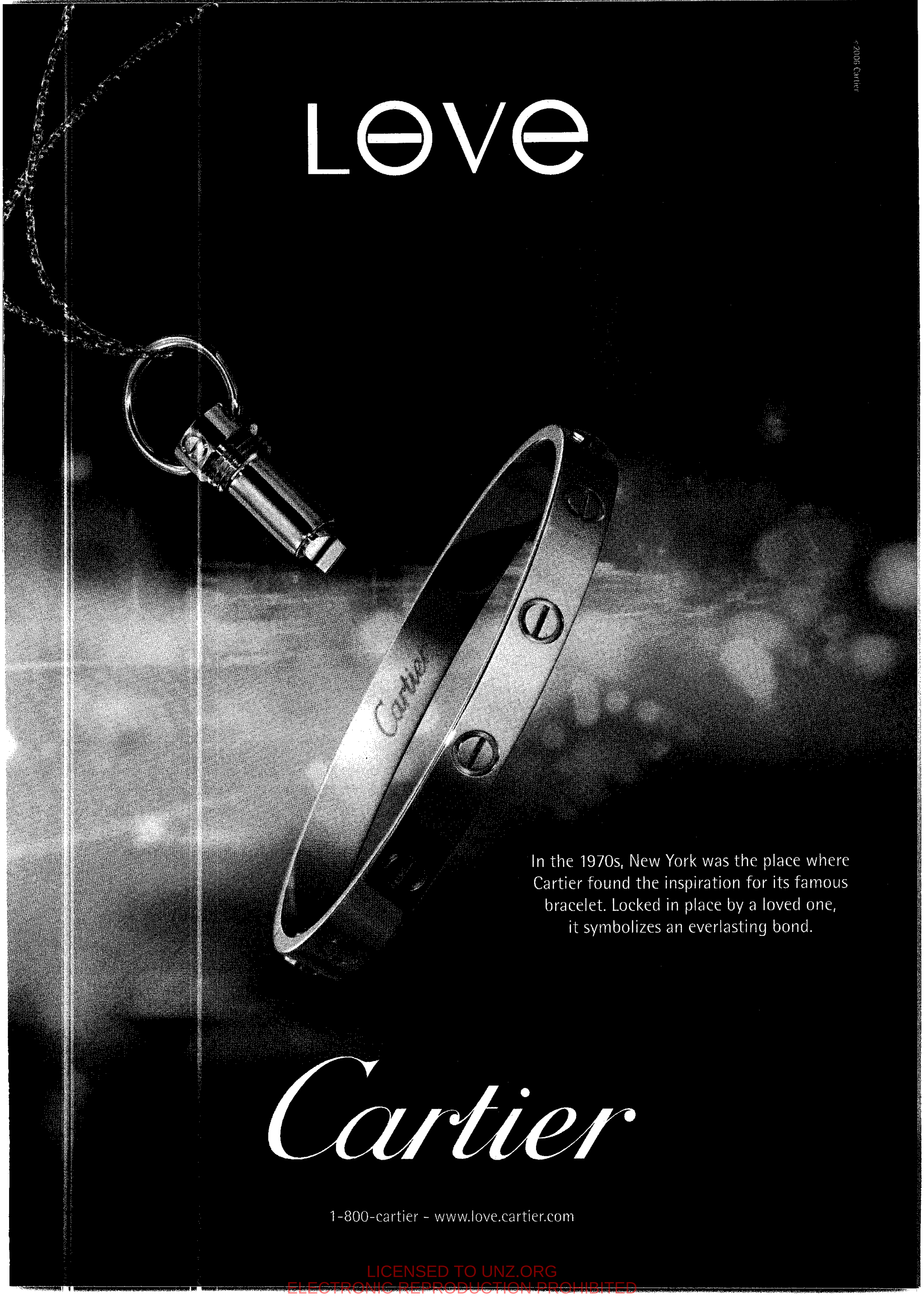

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FALL PREVIEW INSIDE

Performers in the Spiegeltent, at South Street Seaport. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
PRIME TIME

Cynthia Nixon takes on the role that earned Zoe Caldwell a Tony in 1968 (and Maggie Smith an Oscar in 1970) in "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," now a New Group production at the Acorn, on Theatre Row. Adapted from the novel by Muriel Spark, a version of which was published in this magazine in 1961, the drama portrays a nineteen-thirties Scottish schoolteacher who eschews convention in her classroom and in her life. Scott Elliott directs. (See page 28.)

ART
LENSCRAFTER

The London-based sculptor Anish Kapoor installs his monumental "Sky Mirror" in Rockefeller Plaza this weekend. The twenty-three-ton concave mirror will invert and distort views of Fifth Avenue, giving passersby a fun-house perspective on the surrounding buildings and bringing the clouds down to eye level. (See page 38.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SWEET TOOTH

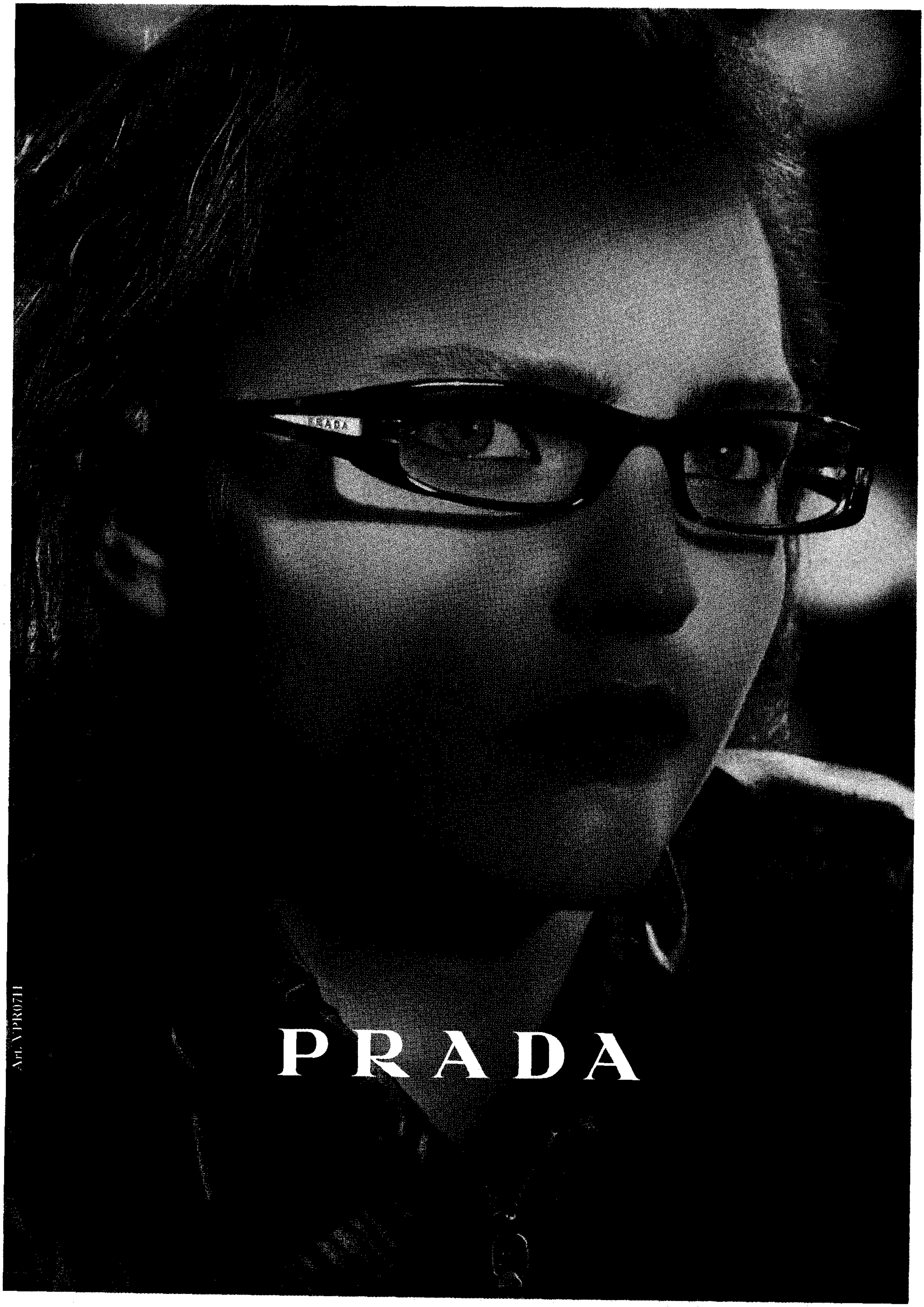
Before Erich Wolfgang Korngold fled to Hollywood to write film scores, he was a major composer in Vienna. "Die Tote Stadt," a pseudo-Freudian drama with a lusciously late-Romantic score, is one of the more delightful confections of modern opera; it returns to New York City Opera this week. (See page 44.)

MOVIES
THE FULL MONTY

"Pythonalot," Film Forum's two-week tribute to the antic cinematic oeuvre of the Monty Python troupe, kicks off with a week of medieval monkeyshines; "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" features Graham Chapman as King Arthur and Terry Gilliam (who co-directed) as his faithful footman. Viewers at selected shows can win tickets to "Spamalot" and cans of Spam. (See page 54.)

READINGS AND TALKS
FREE VERSE

Stanley Kunitz, a former poet laureate of the United States, was a hundred when he died, in May. Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Galway Kinnell, Gretchen Kunitz, Genine Lentine, and others offer a memorial at the 92nd Street Y. (See page 56.)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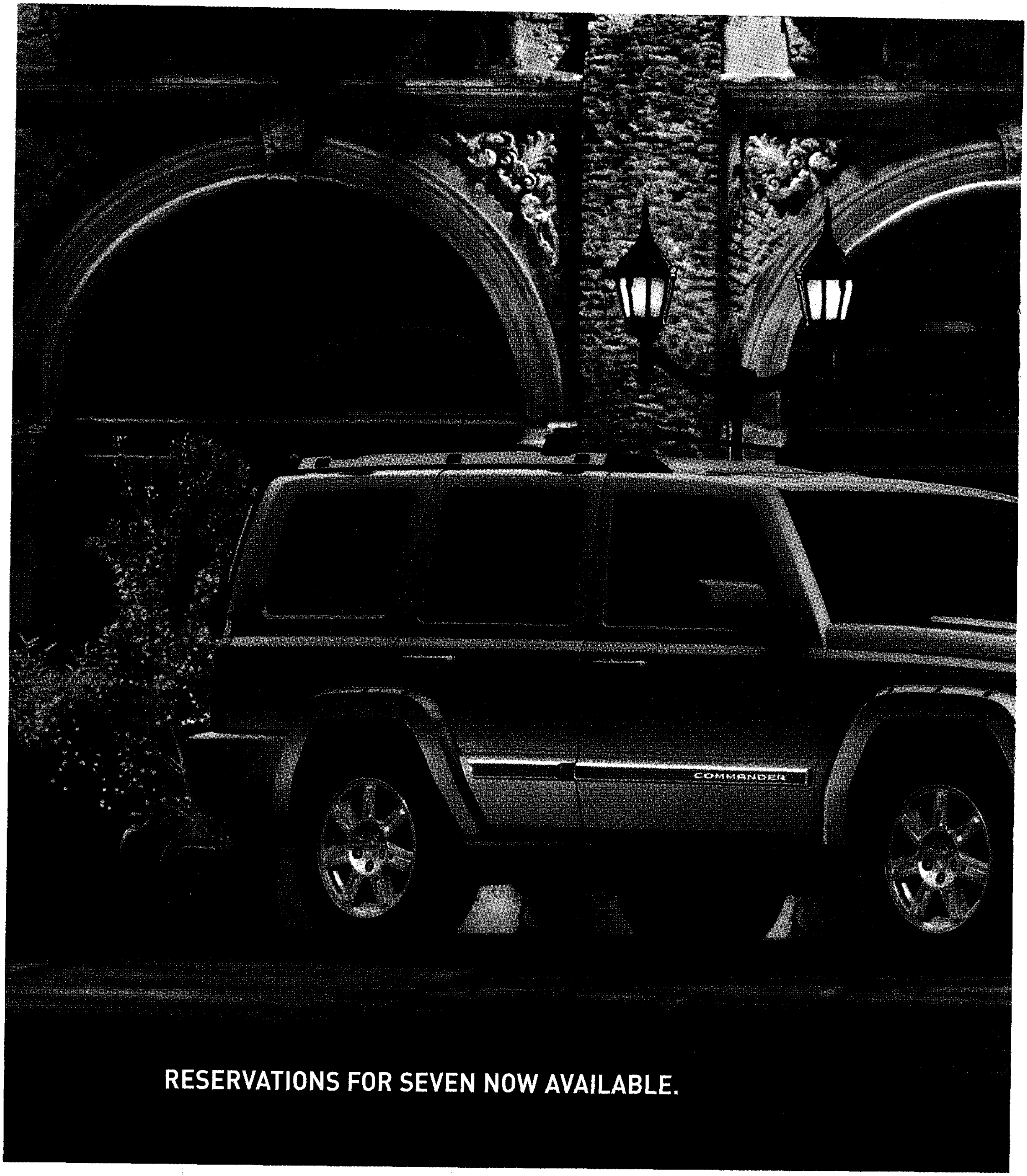
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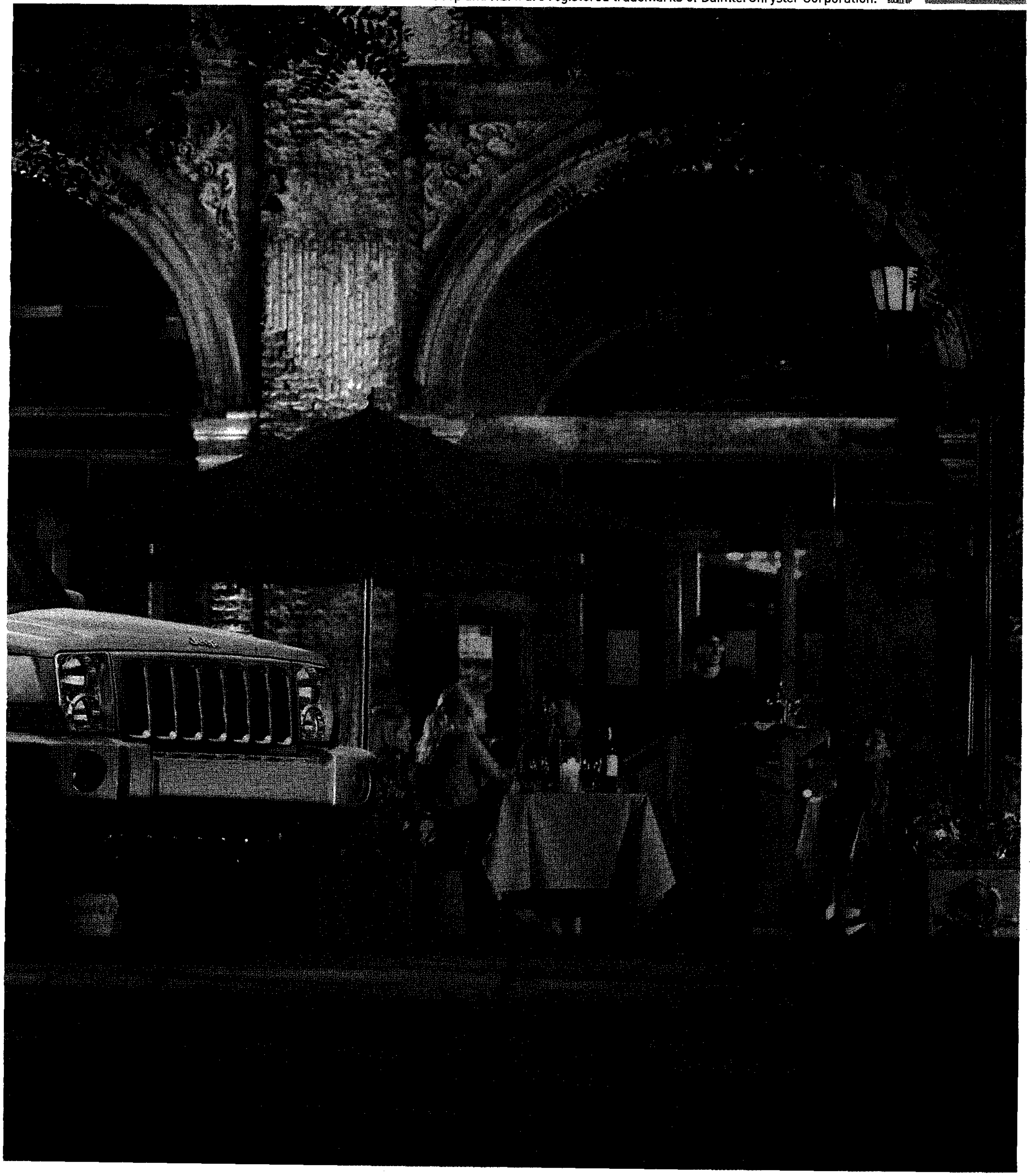

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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ALLENDE: THE DEATH OF A PRESIDENT
Rodolfo Quebleen wrote this monologue, which details the last hours of the life of Chilean President Salvador Allende, who died as the result of a coup orchestrated by Augusto Pinochet in 1973. Opens Sept. 21. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-254-1109.)

BIRTH AND AFTER BIRTH
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of Tina Howe's comedy about overachieving parents trying to impress a childless anthropologist couple with their four-year-old's birthday party. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

A CHORUS LINE
A revival of the 1975 musical conceived by Michael Bennett, about twenty-four aspirants for eight spots in the chorus of a Broadway show. With music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. Bob Avian directs. In previews. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

¡EL CONQUISTADOR!
The New York première of a play by Thaddeus Phillips, about a Colombian peasant who flees his war-torn village to become a soap-opera star. Tatiana Mallarino directs. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

EUROPEAN DREAM FESTIVAL
The inaugural year for this festival, which showcases cultural events from twenty-three European countries, includes "The Tower of Babel," from the Netherlands, at P.S. 122. Opens Sept. 20. (Venues vary. For complete schedule, visit www.europeandream.us.)

FOOLS AND LOVERS
Moonwork presents a musical derived from several Shakespeare classics, directed by Gregory Wolfe. Previews begin Sept. 21. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

HEARTBREAK HOUSE
Roundabout Theatre Company opens its season with George Bernard Shaw's romantic drama from 1920, set on an English country estate. Starring Philip Bosco, Swoosie Kurtz, Byron Jennings, Lily Rabe, and Laila Robins. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

JAY JOHNSON: THE TWO AND ONLY
The veteran ventriloquist and ex-"Soap" star Johnson portrays an array of characters, from monkey to tennis ball, in this production, which originated at the Atlantic Theatre Company. Murphy Cross and Paul Kreppel co-directed. In previews. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

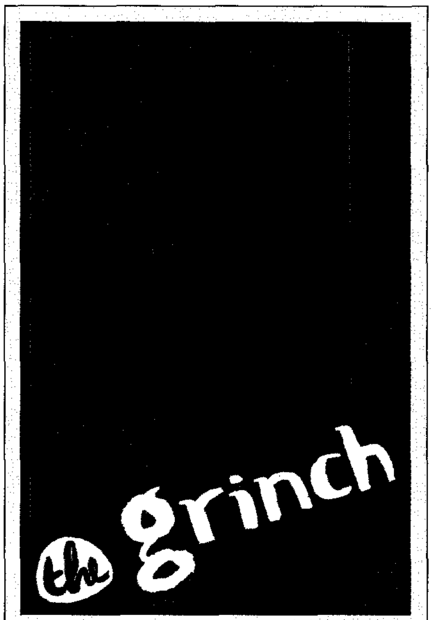
JOHN FERGUSON
Mint Theatre Company revives St. John Ervine's play from 1919, about an Irish farmer who needs a miracle. Martin Platt directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 25. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

LOSING LOUIE
Matthew Arkin and Scott Cohen star in the U.S. première of Simon Mendes da Costa's comedy, a portrait of two generations, fifty years apart. Jerry Zaks directs. Previews begin Sept. 21. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MACHIAVELLI
Evan Bergman directs Richard Vetere's comic play about the Florentine Renaissance philosopher. In previews. Opens Sept. 24. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-239-6200.)

NIXON'S NIXON
MCC Theatre presents Russell Lees's play, which imagines a conversation between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger the night Nixon resigned from the Presidency. Directed by Jim Simpson. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PAIN AND THE ITCH
Playwrights Horizons opens its season with a new comedy by Bruce Norris, a satire of a self-conscious liberal family. Anna D. Shapiro directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 21. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)



THEATRE PREVIEW

As always, the season offers a mix of productions from smaller theatres, big-budget musicals, and attempts to bring movie-star wattage to the stage.

SUCCESS STORIES
Several of last season's Off-Broadway hits move to the Great White Way, including "Grey Gardens" (Nov. 2), a musical in which Christine Ebersole incarnates Little Edie Beale, a reclusive cousin of Jackie Kennedy's; "The Little Dog Laughed" (Nov. 13), the comedy by Douglas Carter Beane, featuring Julie White as an avaricious Hollywood agent; and "Spring Awakening" (Dec. 10), which arrives fresh from its Atlantic Theatre Company run.

STAR POWER
Julianne Moore and Bill Nighy star in the world première of "The Vertical Hour" (Nov. 30), David Hare's drama about a Yale political-science teacher whose views are altered by her boyfriend's unconventional father. At the Public, Ed Harris stars in Neil LaBute's latest drama, "Wrecks" (Oct. 10). Tom Stoppard's trilogy about a group of Russian intellectuals, "The Coast of Utopia," begins its run with "Part One: Voyage" (Nov. 5); the cast includes Brían F. O'Byrne, Billy Crudup, Jennifer Ehle, Ethan Hawke, and Martha Plimpton.

MUSIC TIME
Twyla Tharp melds choreography with the music of Bob Dylan in "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (Oct. 26). "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas!—the Musical" (Nov. 8) brings the classic children's story of the mean green antihero to life. The West End sensation "Mary Poppins" (Nov. 16) stars Ashley Brown and Gavin Lee. The new musical "High Fidelity" (Dec. 7), adapted from Nick Hornby's novel, follows a rock-music snob obsessed with his romantic failures.

OFF BROADWAY
Alan Rickman directs the controversial solo play "My Name Is Rachel Corrie" (Oct. 15), derived from the diaries and letters of an American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer. Christine Baranski and George Grizzard star in Paul Rudnick's comedy of manners "Regrets Only" (Nov. 19). And David Mamet has adapted Harley Granville-Barker's play "The Voysey Inheritance" (Dec. 6), about a family who discover that their patriarch is a crook.

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE
Cynthia Nixon stars as an outspoken teacher in a Scottish girls' school in the nineteen-thirties, in this play adapted from the Muriel Spark novel, presented by the New Group. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN
The première of Young Jean Lee's comic look at her Korean-American identity, presented by Here Arts Center. Previews begin Sept. 21. Opens Sept. 25. (145 Sixth Ave. 212-352-3101.)

SOUTHERN COMFORTS
Primary Stages presents this drama, in which a widow and a widower fall in love during the golden years of their lives. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUBURBIA
Second Stage Theatre begins its season with an updated version of Eric Bogosian's 1994 study of teen angst and racial tension, starring Daniel Eric Gold, Jessica Capshaw, and Kieran Culkin. Jo Bonney directs. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'
Twyla Tharp conceived, directed, and choreographed this jukebox musical set to the music of Bob Dylan. Previews begin Sept. 25. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

WRECKS
Ed Harris stars in the U.S. première of Neil LaBute's latest play, about a Midwestern man who has just lost his wife, in a production that first appeared in Cork, Ireland. Directed by LaBute. Previews begin Sept. 26. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

NOW PLAYING

ABSINTHE
Spiegeltent (or "tent of mirrors"), the odd and remarkable venue that has materialized at the former site of the Fulton Fish Market, has its ideal headlining event in this sexy circus for adults. Not only are the performers virtuosic, most of them also have a naughty streak, and some of them wear very little clothing. The show's motley program, which includes a debauched scissor swallower and a woman who makes handkerchiefs appear from the most provocative places, proves that sideshow stunts can be just as eye-popping writ small as they are under the big top. If you've been thinking of running away to join the circus, go with this one. (Pier 17, South Street Seaport. 212-279-4200.)

ASYLUM: THE STRANGE CASE OF MARY LINCOLN
York Theatre Company presents the world première of a musical about the life of Mary Todd Lincoln a decade after her husband's assassination. (Reviewed in this issue.) (619 Lexington Ave. 212-868-4444.)

ESOTERICA
The magician and actor Eric Walton wrote and performs in this show, a mix of magic and storytelling, directed by Elysa Marden. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

FIZZ
Sam Gold directs the world première of a comedy by Rogelio Martinez, about Roberto Goizueta, the Cuban immigrant turned C.E.O. who was behind the much ballyhooed, ultimately failed New Coke. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-279-4200.)

FOGGY BOTTOM
A political comedy by James Armstrong, directed by Rob Urbinati, about a low-ranking bureaucrat from the State Department (Dan Cordle) who promises women green cards in exchange for sexual favors. Eventually, they're all taken hostage by a pair of Central Asian terrorists, and hilarity almost ensues. The cast does a nice job with the material, but the quaint farcical tools employed by Armstrong aren't cutting enough for the subject matter: it takes more than a little "Noises Off"-style buffoonery to do comedic jus-

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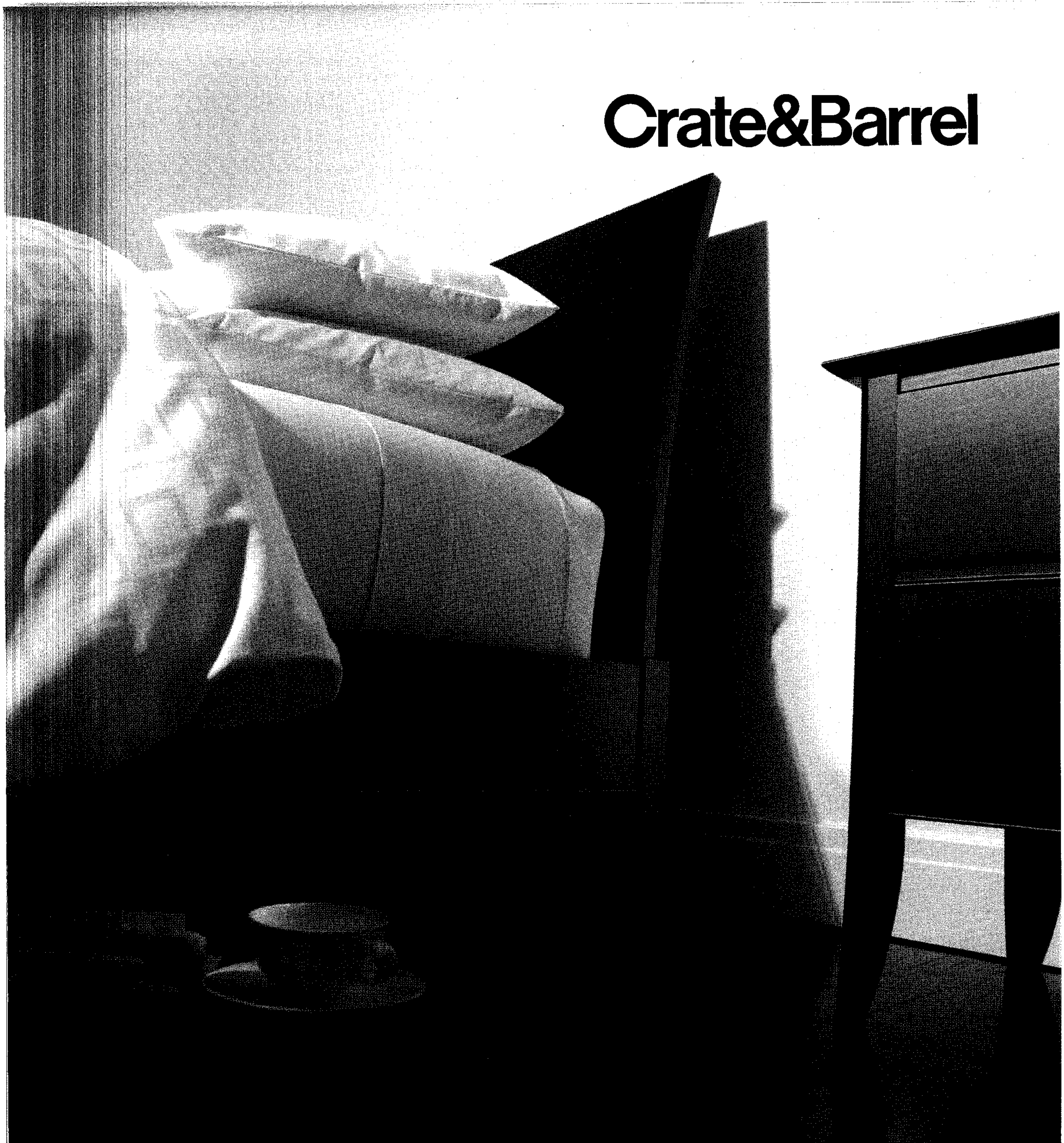

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tice to U.S. imperialism and Third World massacres. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444. Through Sept. 24.)

FRINGENYC ENCORES
Ten of the festival's best shows are reprised in repertory at two venues. (212-352-3101. For complete schedule, visit www.fringenycencores.com. Through Sept. 24.)

THE GUYS
Tom Wopat stars in a commemorative limited engagement of Anne Nelson's drama, a dialogue between a fire captain who lost eight of his men on 9/11 and an editor who helps him prepare their eulogies. (The Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 23.)

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING
Bill Bowers is a mime—but "not a scary mime"—and he has something to say. He grew up gay in Montana, he tells us, where both the landscape and the people were characterized by their profound silence; in turn, he made silence his art form and means of survival. From Montana, we follow him through a string of increasingly absurd gigs, loves found and lost, and a disillusioning stint as a pupil of Marcel Marceau. The show, directed by Martha Banta, hews closely to the familiar tools of solo confessional theatre, with only a stool and a flip chart as props. But the strength of Bowers's performance, which laces sentimentality with deadpan wit, easily overcomes the conventionality of the staging. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

Montreal's Sunset Rubdown plays two nights at the Bowery Ballroom this week.

FERNANDA COHEN

LEMKIN'S HOUSE
Catherine Filloux's drama about Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer who dedicated his life to fighting genocide. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-352-3101.)

THE MAN HIMSELF
A seated man (Ami Dayan, who also directed) in an industrial-gray jumpsuit scans the audience with an unsettling mixture of disdain, defiance, and resignation, then slowly begins to tell his story, his voice carrying a trace of an Eastern European accent. He talks of his job as a warehouse parts manager, speaks of the disrespect he receives from co-workers just for following regulations, laments the breakdown of a moral society, reveals a humiliating episode from his marriage, and touches on his growing friendship with a pamphleteering Evangelical. Alan Drury's hour-long monologue takes pains to paint him as the gray mouse whom his wife called "the most inconspicuous person she had ever met," so when the onstage moment of radicalization comes it's shocking but not altogether convincing. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME
The consummate comedian-performer, Short glides effortlessly through his latest Broadway incarnation, an arch sendup of theatrical egotism. High points include a "Wizard of Oz" takeoff with Dorothy (Mary Birdsong) lamenting the salesman who got away and Short as an emotionally supportive fence, and Short's Jiminy Glick bit, in which he brilliantly improvises an interview with a wild-card audience member. Even though the story loses its way toward the end, Short delivers a big finish, returning to knowingly, disarmingly beg the audience to show him the love he craves. It works. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NAMI
John Gould Rubin directs the world première of a new play by Chad Beckim, in which two neighbors intervene in what they think is a plot to sell a child into sex slavery. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
The annual festival of new musicals returns, with more than thirty works in twelve theatres throughout the city. (Various venues. 212-352-3101. For complete schedule, visit www.nymf.org.)

THE NIBBLER
Victoria Roberts, a cartoonist for this magazine, portrays Nona, a character who appears frequently in her cartoons. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery. 212-219-0736.)

THE PRANCING HORSE
Sage Theatre Company presents this romantic drama by Richard Lay, about a trio of regulars at an Atlantic City casino. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

RICHARD II
Michael Cumpsty stars in Classic Stage Company's presentation of Shakespeare's historical drama. Brian Kulick directs. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SEVEN GUITARS
Set during the years when the fighter Joe Louis was known to the world as the great black hope, August Wilson's story describes the crippling effect dashed dreams can have on the dreamer and those who love him. Floyd Barton (Lance Reddick) is a musician who wants to leave Pittsburgh for the bright lights of Chicago. But his beloved girlfriend (Roslyn Ruff) cannot let go of her distrust of him, or her life as a concerned member of a small community of realists. While Reddick is a bit too actorly—clenched jaws and fists to convey tension, etc.—there are a number of standouts in the cast, particularly Brenda Pressley as Louise, who gives her pivotal role as a nosy neighbor all she's got. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

SISTERS
Declan Hassett's new one-woman play stars Anna Manahan as Martha and Mary, two sisters living contrasting lives in Ireland in the fifties. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THEOPHILUS NORTH
A young traveller finds himself amidst the wealth and glamour of Newport, Rhode Island, in this adaptation of Thornton Wilder's novel from 1973. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

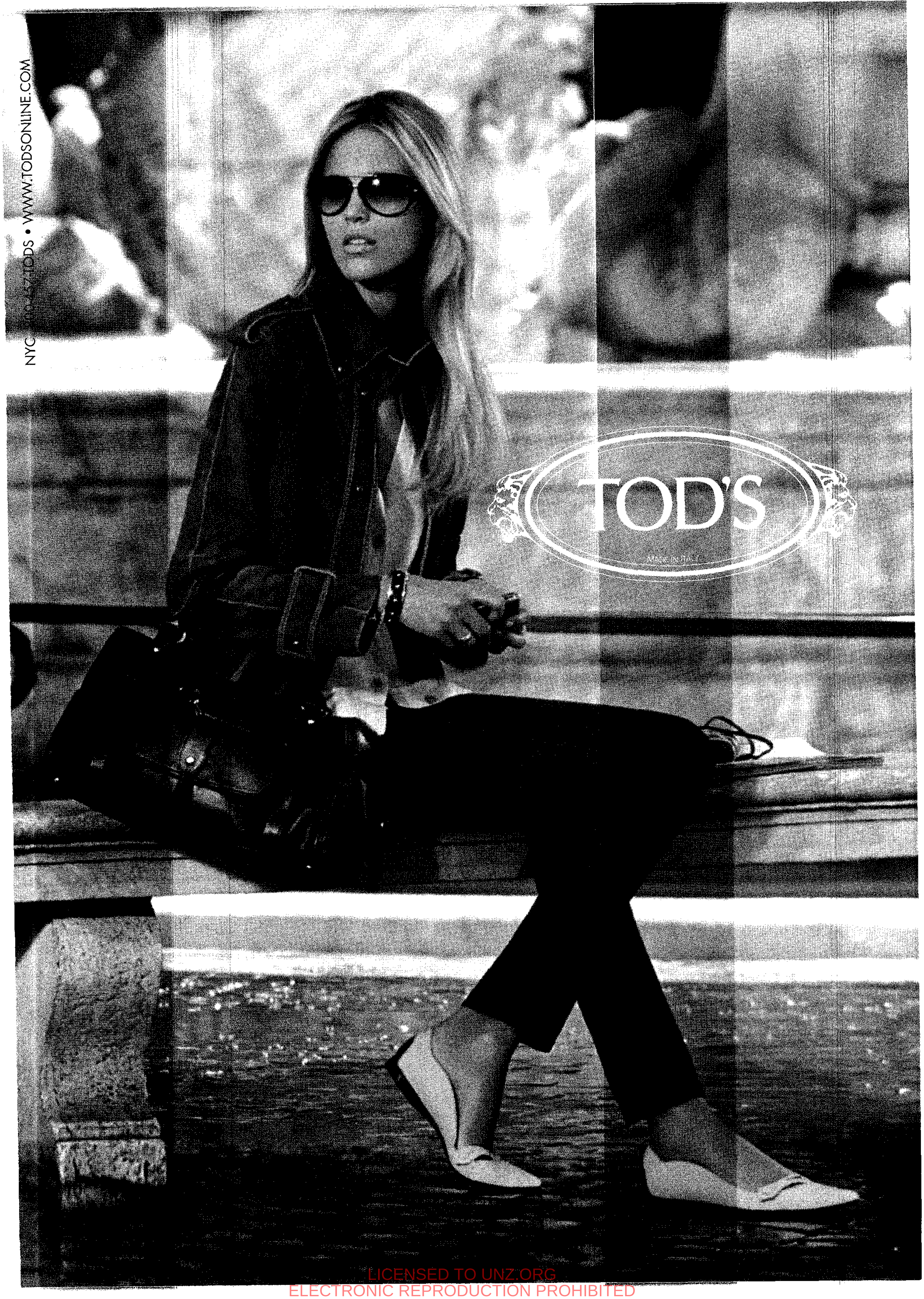
THE TREATMENT
Dylan McDermott and Portia star in the world première of a new play by Eve Ensler ("The Vagina Monologues"), about a traumatized soldier and his female psychologist. The play kicks off the Impact Festival at the Culture Project. Leigh Silverman directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

THE VICKIE AND NICKIE DREAM TOUR!
The sisters Lori and Lisa Brigantino portray a singing-housewife sibling duo from Minnesota, in this musical-comedy cabaret. Wednesday nights. (Upstairs at Rose's Turn, 55 Grove St. 212-366-5438.)

WASPS IN BED
Three old friends convene at a wedding celebration in the Berkshires in Nicola Behrman's comedy, directed by Lisa Marie Meller. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE HISTORY BOYS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-279-4200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.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NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 23: One of the greatest soul and blues singers, **Bobby (Blue) Bland,** settles in and displays his signature growl. Later that night: the guitarist **Buckethead** may look silly (he wears a K.F.C. bucket on his head), but his playing is no joke. Sept. 24: The veteran keyboardist **Al Kooper,** whose credits as a songwriter ("This Diamond Ring"), session player (organ on "Like a Rolling Stone"), bandleader (the Blues Project; Blood, Sweat & Tears), and producer (Lynyrd Skynyrd) read like a walking tour through the sixties and seventies. Sept. 25: The **English Beat,** the flagship band of the U.K.'s ska boom of the late seventies, mixed the rhythms of classic ska with the energy of punk and an infectious pop sensibility that earned them success with several singles, including "Mirror in the Bathroom" and "Save It for Later." The original members of the band parted ways long ago, but the vocalist and songwriter Dave Wakeling continues to perform under the name.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Sept. 22: The singer-songwriter **Adam Green,** who once made a splash as half of the eccentric local "anti-folk" duo the Moldy Peaches, drops in with songs from his eclectic new collection, "Jacket Full of Danger." Sept. 23: The Empire State reggae band **John Brown's Body** combines big-band instruments and a jam-band vibe. Sept. 24-25: **Sunset Rubdown** is a side project of Spencer Krug, the keyboardist, singer, and songwriter for the celebrated Montreal band Wolf Parade. Sunset started out as a lo-fi solo effort, but for its début album, "Shut Up I Am Dreaming," Krug pulled together a band that includes the vocalist Camilla Wynne Ingr, formerly of Pony Up! The music is vast and varied, ranging from midway-esque riffs to headphone-ready rock.

CBGB & OMFUG
315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-982-4052)—Sept. 21: San Francisco's **Dead Kennedys** are the crucial band of the early-eighties hardcore punk era, but the current incarnation is lacking the visceral spark that made the original lineup so incendiary. The founding vocalist, Jello Biafra, has been long estranged from his former bandmates following a dispute over royalties. The remaining members of the band—East Bay Ray, Klaus Flouride, and D. H. Peligro—have found a replacement, Jeff Penalty, and he does an able job, but the original's shoes are hard to fill. Sept. 25: The Reggae renegade **Lee (Scratch) Perry.**

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 25-26: Though pegged with labels like "side project" and "dalliance," the **Raconteurs**—led by the White Stripes front man Jack White and the power-pop singer-songwriter Brendan Benson—insist that the band is a bona-fide entity and not just a lark. Bolstered by critical acclaim for their début album, "Broken Boy Soldiers," and a forthcoming tour opening for Bob Dylan, the Raconteurs may very well have the last laugh. Which begs the question: But what will Meg White do?

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 21: Little Steven's Underground Garage party celebrates raw rock and roll of all vintages, from the young'uns in the **Mooney Suzuki** to the vets in the **Zombies.** The bill includes the **Fleshtones** and the **Woggles** as well. Sept. 23: The fetching local country group **Hem.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Sept. 22: The ethereal Brazilian singer **Cibelle.** Later that night, **Dengue Fever** takes over. This polyethnic six-piece band out of Los Angeles plays trippy Cambodian pop songs from the sixties. The lead singer, Chhom Nimol, is a native of Battambong, and she sings in Khmer. Their home-town audiences have been enraptured by their theatrical performances and universal grooves. This is their first appearance in New York City and not to be missed. Sept. 26: Albert Kuvezin, one of the founders of the Tuvan throat-singing group Huun-Huur-Tu, leads his roots-rock band **Yat-Kha.** Roots rock in this case has a unique meaning. On its new album, "Re-Covers," Yat-Kha uses traditional Tuvan instruments (like the long zither that gives the group its name) to play Western rock staples by the likes of Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, Joy Division, and Santana, with Kuve-zin's impossibly deep voice giving new life to old lyrics.

JIMM
HEATH
Litt
Band

NIGHT LIFE PREVIEW

New clubs in Manhattan and in Brooklyn, and the closing of a legendary punk club, mark the season, along with a slew of concerts.

DOWNTOWN DIGS
The Manhattan night-club scene gets an intriguing new addition with the opening of the Box (189 Chrystie St., www.theboxnyc.com), a performance space–cum–supper club backed by a number of industry insiders—including the young Broadway scion Simon Hammerstein, the longtime impresario Serge Becker, the director Richard Kimmel, and Randy Weiner, the writer of "The Donkey Show." Meanwhile, CBGB's, the fabled birthplace of punk, closes next month, but it won't go quietly. Big-name acts have already started returning (see listings), and shows closer to the final day include Fishbone (Sept. 28) and surprise guests.

OUTER-BOROUGH WAYS
Some of the folks who opened the Delancey are setting up camp in Greenpoint. In a sizable erstwhile Polish night club they are now calling Studio B (259 Banker St., www.clubstudiob.com), they're taking ample advantage of the disco lighting and generous dance floor. The Fixed party, featuring Soulwax, Klaxons, and 2 Many DJs, formally christens the space on Sept. 21.

THE JAZZ WORLD
The New Orleans transplant Wynton Marsalis has long been a defender of the music of his former home town—and particularly that of Louis Armstrong. He brings the revolutionary sounds of Armstrong's late-twenties Hot Fives and Sevens to life with assistance from the trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, the clarinettist Victor Goines, the banjo player Don Vappie, and others at Rose Theatre (Sept. 28-30). Next month, Jimmy Heath gets the royal treatment he's always deserved but has not always received. He celebrates his eightieth birthday at the Blue Note with his Little Man Big Band (Oct. 11-15). With Bill Cosby, Clark Terry, and James Moody.

MORE SHOWS
The Rolling Stones and Kanye West come to the Meadowlands (Sept. 27); the hard-rocking Brooklynites the Hold Steady are at Irving Plaza (Oct. 1); Barbra Streisand returns to Madison Square Garden (Oct. 9 and Oct. 11); and TV on the Radio are onstage at Irving Plaza (Oct. 17-18).

"LET'S ZYDECO"
Sept. 23: The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana presents the **Savoy Family Cajun Band,** led by the accordionist Marc and the singer and guitarist Ann. The Savoys run an accordion store and shop in Eunice, where they hold Saturday-morning jam sessions that are open to all comers. Their family band is limited to their sons, Joel, on lead fiddle, and Wilson, on keyboards and fiddle. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Sept. 21: The bluesy vocalist **Libby Johnson,** formerly of the folk rockers 22 Brides, inaugurates her solo career with the release of her new album, "Annabella." Sept. 25: The guitarist **Jim Campilongo,** whose regular Monday-night spot draws fans as well as stars (Emmylou Harris and Bonnie Raitt have reportedly been spotted in the audience), celebrates the release of his new CD, "Heaven Is Creepy."

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 21-22: **Queensryche,** the histrionic, progressive eighties metal band, performs the entirety of its 1988 concept album, "Operation: Mindcrime." As an added bonus, the band is also playing its latest release, "Operation: Mindcrime II," the sequel. Sept. 24-25: The **Flaming Lips.** Oklahoma's weirdest musical product returns with songs from its latest album, "At War with the Mystics."

ROCKWOOD MUSIC HALL
196 Allen St. (212-477-4155)—On her début album, "Elevator Ride," **Bronwen Exter's** voice is like a warm mist capable of obscuring all of life's problems. The record is a solid collection of downtempo numbers written mostly by the local ringleader Jonathan Spottiswoode. Exter celebrates the release of the CD here on Sept. 23.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Barbès, a little bar in Park Slope, Brooklyn, has a postage-stamp-size back room with a thriving music scene. The bar has taken to putting out records, and three of its acts cross the river to Manhattan on the night of Sept. 24. **Hazmat Modine,** which is led by the singer and harmonica player Wade Schuman, plays feverish blues originals. **Las Rubias del Norte** have a pair of sweet vocalists, and they rearrange Latin big-band tunes for a small group. **Slavic Soul Party** is a Balkan brass band.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope. (718-230-0236)—Sept. 20: The street-savvy but artsy local punk band the **Shirts,** veterans of the days when Television, Blondie, and the Talking Heads were the latest thing, recently released a new album, "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," its first in more than two decades. Sept. 24: **Yat-Kha** (see Joe's Pub).

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 20: The British quartet **Kasabian** has the acerbic insouciance of Oasis—albeit, refreshingly, without the retro adherence to cliché. The band, which is

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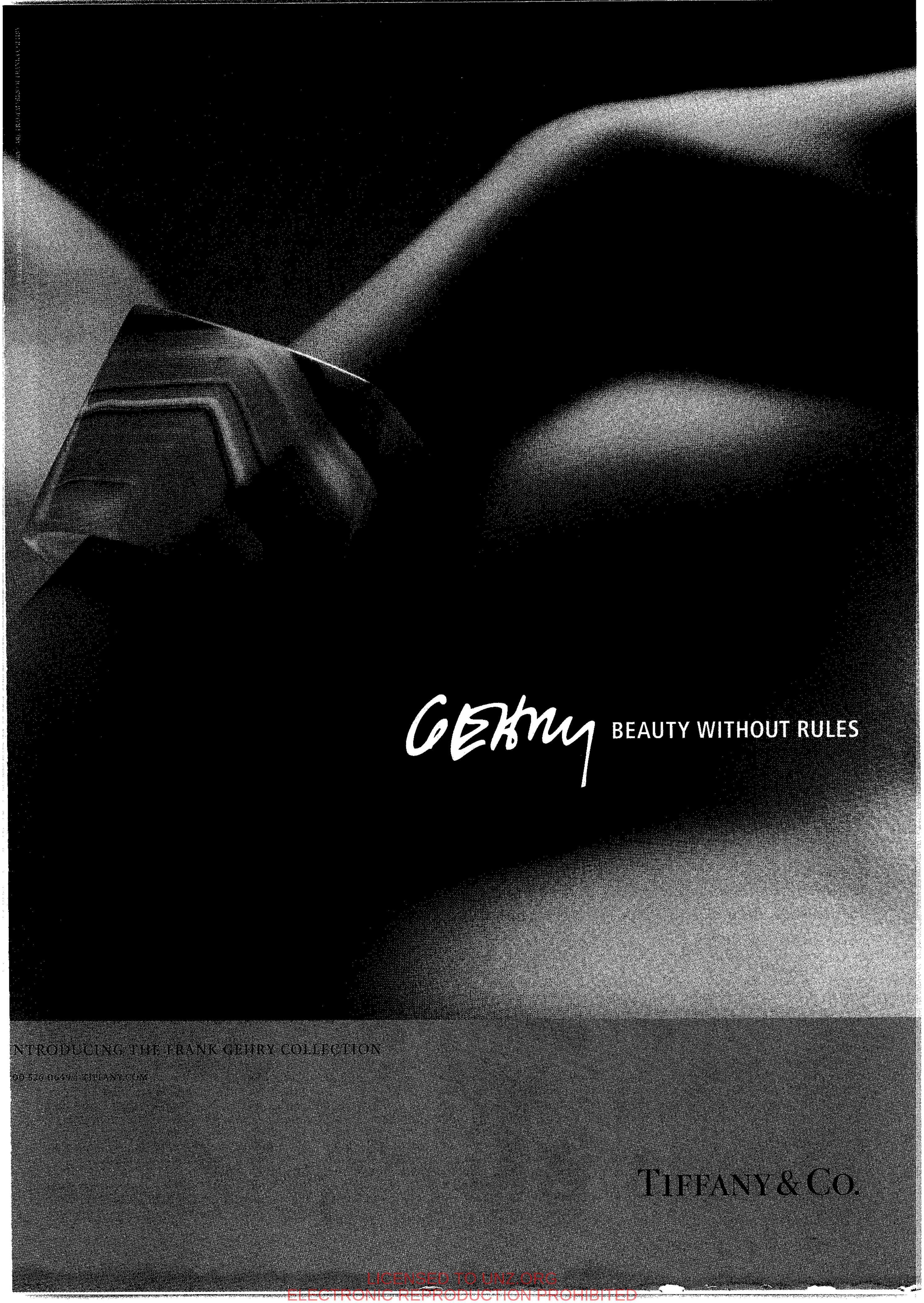
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named for a minor member of the Manson Family, layers its mouthy lad rock with electronics that both groove and swagger. It might just do what its storied predecessors in the Happy Mondays, the Stone Roses, and droves of other British bands never really did—crack America. The band is currently promoting its second album, "Empire."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 20-23: A contemporary saxophone giant, **Joe Lovano,** an original member of John Coltrane's first quartet, the pianist **Steve Kuhn,** an avant-garde mainstay, the drummer **Andrew Cyrille,** and a younger mainstream player, the bassist **Lonnie Plaxico,** celebrate the eightieth anniversary of Coltrane's birth, forty years after his untimely death. The bassist **Henry Grimes** joins the group on the last two nights.

The exhibition "Erich Salomon: Vintage Work," now at Hasted Hunt in Chelsea, includes "Diplomats, 1934," above.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 19-24: Two revered veterans of John Coltrane's groundbreaking bands—the innovative pianist **McCoy Tyner** and the roughhousing saxophonist **Pharoah Sanders**—pay tribute to their former boss and primary inspiration.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Nov. 4, **Elaine Stritch.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Sept. 19-24: The pianist and occasional vocalist **Elaine Elias** refuses to be pigeonholed; tag her as a Brazilian music stylist and she'll turn into a staunch jazz modernist (check out her work on the album "Shades of Jade," by her husband **Marc Johnson,** who is on bass here). Whatever direction she takes, it's worth following her.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Sept. 23: The songwriting and producing legends **Ashford & Simpson,** who know something about how to rock a stage, will do their part to transform this upscale supper club into the Apollo Theatre South.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Sept. 21-24: **Dave Weckl,** a fusion-leaning drummer who did time with Chick Corea and others, leads his own hard-driving unit. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Sept. 22-23: **Dafnis Prieto,** an in-demand drummer who is as well-versed in Latin idioms as he is in mainstream jazz, fronts a sextet.

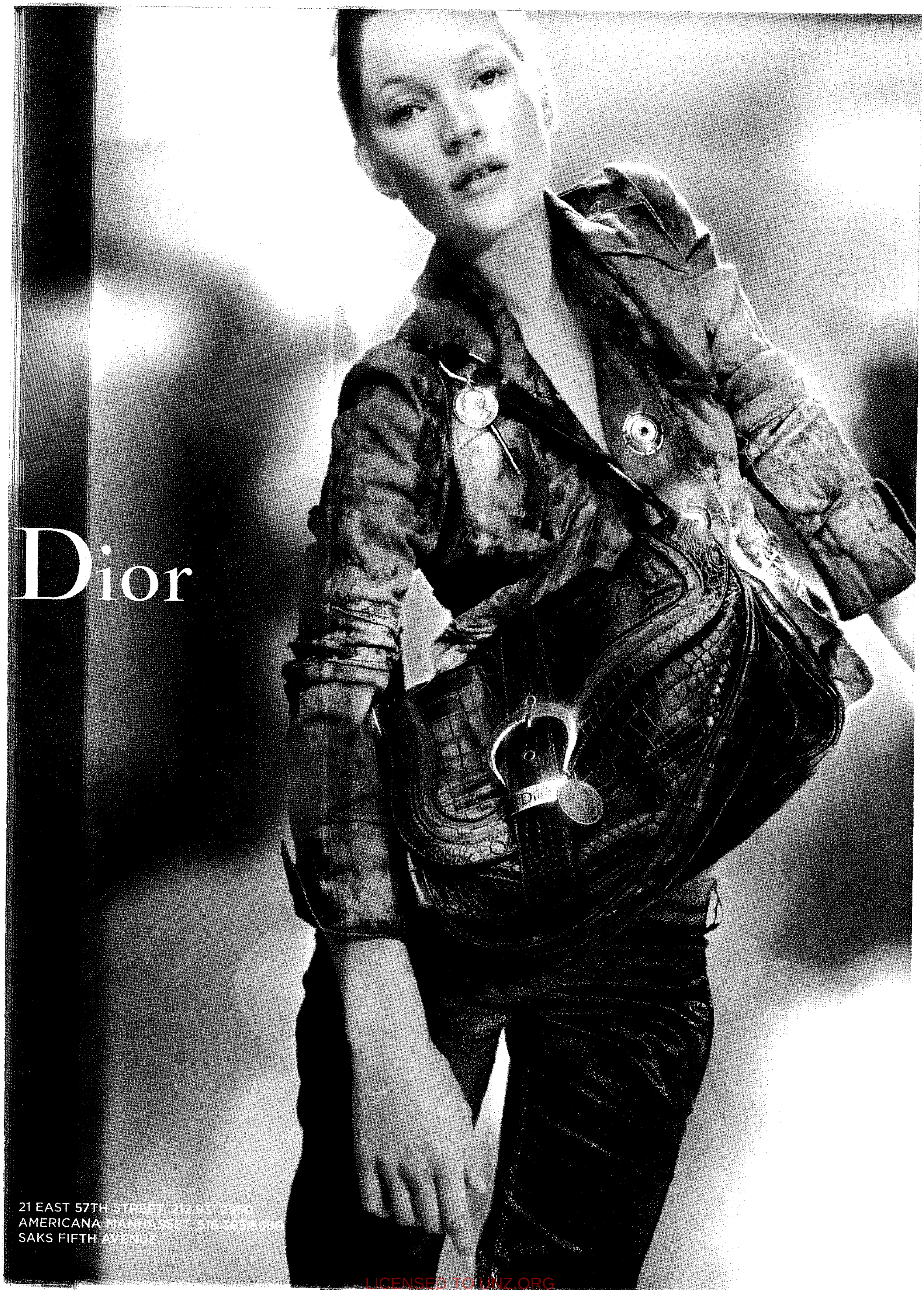
JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Sept. 19-24: The Festival of New Trumpet Music presents a chance to catch up with fast-rising trumpet stylists (**Avishai Cohen, Jeremy Pelt, Sean Jones**) as well as established horn voices (**Marcus Belgrave, Dave Douglas, Steven Bernstein**). The final two nights offer imaginative tributes to the late iconoclast Don Cherry.

ROULETTE
20 Greene St., between Canal and Grand Sts. (212-219-8242)—Sept. 21: **Mark Dresser** and **Raz Mesinai** launch the fall season at Roulette, which started more than two decades ago and is still going strong as a presenter of experimental music. In keeping with their dedication to innovation and cross-fertilization, the avant composer and bassist Dresser (a member of Anthony Braxton's quartet for nine years) mixes it up with Mesinai, a young member of the electronica and electroacoustic music scene, who has a penchant for Middle Eastern grooves. (For more information, visit www.roulette.org.)

SPIEGELTENT
Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—Sept. 23 at midnight: The gravelly-voiced singer and guitarist **Howard Fishman,** joined by the tuba player **Ron Caswell,** the trumpeter **Kevin Louis,** the drummer **Mark McLean,** the trombonist **Andrae Murchison,** and the violinist **Mazz Swift,** delivers a mix of originals, New Orleans brass-band standards, and spirituals. Sept. 24: A present-day ironist with a prewar (First World War, that is) heart, the guitarist, vocalist, and composer Matt Munisteri leads the delightful, lightly swinging chamber-jazz quintet **Brock Mumford.**

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Sept. 24: A dynamite trio with the saxophonist **Ned Rothenberg,** the slide guitarist **David Tronzo** (he's also a guest at the Sex Mob CD release show at Tonic; see below), and the tuba player **Marcus Rojas.** (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—The trumpet player, composer, arranger, and bandleader Steven Bernstein doesn't seem to need much sleep. He's a regular at



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SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

Levon Helm's biweekly Midnight Ramble sessions in Woodstock; he's preparing for a Hal Willner-produced concert tribute to Leonard Cohen in Dublin (he was also the musical director for the documentary film "I'm Your Man"); he's working on arrangements for Lou Reed's performance of his 1973 concept album, "Berlin," at St. Ann's Warehouse in December; he gigs all over town (his Millennial Territory Orchestra is part of the Don Cherry program at the Jazz Standard this week; see above); and he just put out three new albums, one of which is with his band **Sex Mob.** On Sept. 22, it celebrates the release of "Sexotica," which was inspired by the music of the late Martin Denny, the man who created "exotica" music in the late nineteen-fifties using sounds from Latin America, Asia, and the South Pacific, not to mention the occasional birdcall and croaking bullfrog.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Sept. 20: **Cassandra Wilson.** On her latest album, "Thunderbird," Wilson continues what she has excelled at for the past decade: transforming blues, folk, popular song, and jazz into a hybrid all her own.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 19-24: Last year, **Fred Hersch** became the first pianist in the seven-decade history of this venerable club to perform a weeklong solo engagement. Expect Hersch, who is here with his trio, to exhibit formal smarts and poetic verve. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

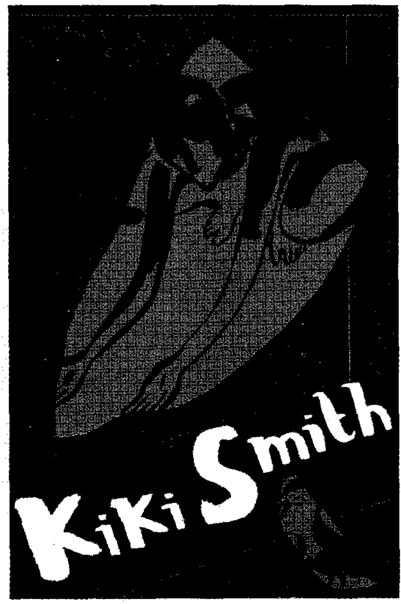
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1867-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, Gauguin, Derain, and many others; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work they made under his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** Opens Sept. 19. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** Since April, the roof garden has been home to four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them is "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that produces a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints."** Through Oct. 15. ♦ **"The Fabric of Life: Ikat Textiles of Indonesia."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Accordions and Harmonicas of the Nineteenth Century."** Through March 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Artist's Choice: Herzog & de Meuron, Perception Restrained."** The Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron have built what they call a "perception machine" to view objects culled from the permanent collection. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska."** Results of MOMA's Architecture Department regime change are inconclusive as yet; in the meantime, Sosnowska provides a little architectural folly in the Contemporary wing. Blowing through the concrete floor separating the second and third levels, she's opened up a jagged little space for viewers to peer through, up into an anonymous white-walled space. Light filters down, as in a cathedral or a baroque painting. The floor below is littered with plasticky shards like bits of a comic strip's kaboom come to life in three dimensions. As an art work, "The Hole" is more of a one-liner than a revolutionary gesture, but it's still fun to see Yoshio Taniguchi's precious über-modern temple punctured, just a tiny bit, for the sake of art. Through Nov. 27. ♦ **"New Photography 2006: Jonathan Monk, Barbara Probst, Jules Spinatsch."** Opens Sept. 21. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)



ART PREVIEW

After a summer of gallery group shows and museum shows tracking movements and eras, individual artists come to the fore again.

SINGULAR SENSATIONS

"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005" opens at the Whitney on Nov. 16. The show will examine the common threads in a career that has spanned installation, drawing, photography, and printmaking, in addition to her most well-known genre, sculpture. At MOMA, "Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings" (Oct. 29-Jan. 15) will take the measure of a painter whose waxed monochromes gave way to exuberantly colored calligraphic compositions. At the Brooklyn Museum, three solo exhibitions dominate the fall schedule. Walton Ford's witty post-Audubon nature paintings (Nov. 3-Jan. 28) and Ron Mueck's hyper-realist sculptures (Nov. 3-Feb. 4) sound intriguing, but the blockbuster will likely be "Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005" (Oct. 20-Jan. 21), a survey of photographs of actors, politicians, writers, artists, and her own family and friends.

IN THE GALLERIES

Several galleries have recently moved to new spaces in Chelsea, including Marianne Boesky and the Brooklyn stalwart Black & White. Team took another tack, leaving the bustle of Chelsea for Grand Street, where it will open a show of new work by Cory Arcangel on Sept. 29. PaceWildenstein's Twenty-fifth Street location will house recent works by Elizabeth Murray starting Oct. 13. Lisa Yuskavage, the painter of disconcerting pinups, has her first opening at her new gallery home, Zwirner, on Oct. 18. Other notable gallery shows include Christian Marclay at Paula Cooper (Oct. 6-Nov. 4), Fred Tomaselli at Cohan (Oct. 7-Nov. 11), Bryan Hunt at Danese (Oct. 13-Nov. 11), Maureen Gallace at 303 (Nov. 11-Dec. 22), and Marilyn Minter at Salon 94 (Nov. 12-Dec. 20).

AROUND THE WORLD

The Guggenheim's grandly subtitled "Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and History" opens on Nov. 17, the biggest star in a constellation of internationally themed museum shows this fall. Among the others are "Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture," at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (Oct. 7), "Africa Comics," at the Studio Museum in Harlem (Nov. 15-March 18), and "Americans in Paris, 1860-1900," at the Met (Oct. 24-Jan. 28).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock Paintings on Paper."** Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Zaha Hadid."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—A series of large-scale drawings by Los Angeles-based artist **Mark Grotjean** fill the first-floor gallery. The colorful geometric abstractions are composed with multiple vanishing points. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Much of **"Full House,"** the Whitney's seventy-fifth-anniversary extravaganza, remains open into the fall, including the Pop art on the third floor (through Oct. 8), the Abstract Expressionism on the second floor (through Oct. 15), and the magnificent fifth-floor display of the works of Edward Hopper (through Dec. 3). (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Looking Back from Ground Zero: Images from the Brooklyn Museum Collection."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART

580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—The theme of **"Ecotopia,"** the I.C.P.'s second triennial of photography and video, is the global environment in flux and in trouble. The artists, some making their New York début here, are from fourteen countries and include Simon Norfolk, Sophie Ristelhueber, Robert Adams, Thomas Ruff, Alessandra Sanguinetti, Mitch Epstein, and Joan Fontcuberta. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Italia! Muse to American Artists"** is a modest show with a massive subject: Italy's influence on American artists since 1830. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Gustav Klimt: Five Paintings from the Collection of Ferdinand and Adele Bloch-Bauer"** includes the 1907 gold-and-silver-laced portrait of Adele, which will be joining the Neue Galerie's permanent collection. Through Oct. 9. (Open Thursdays and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

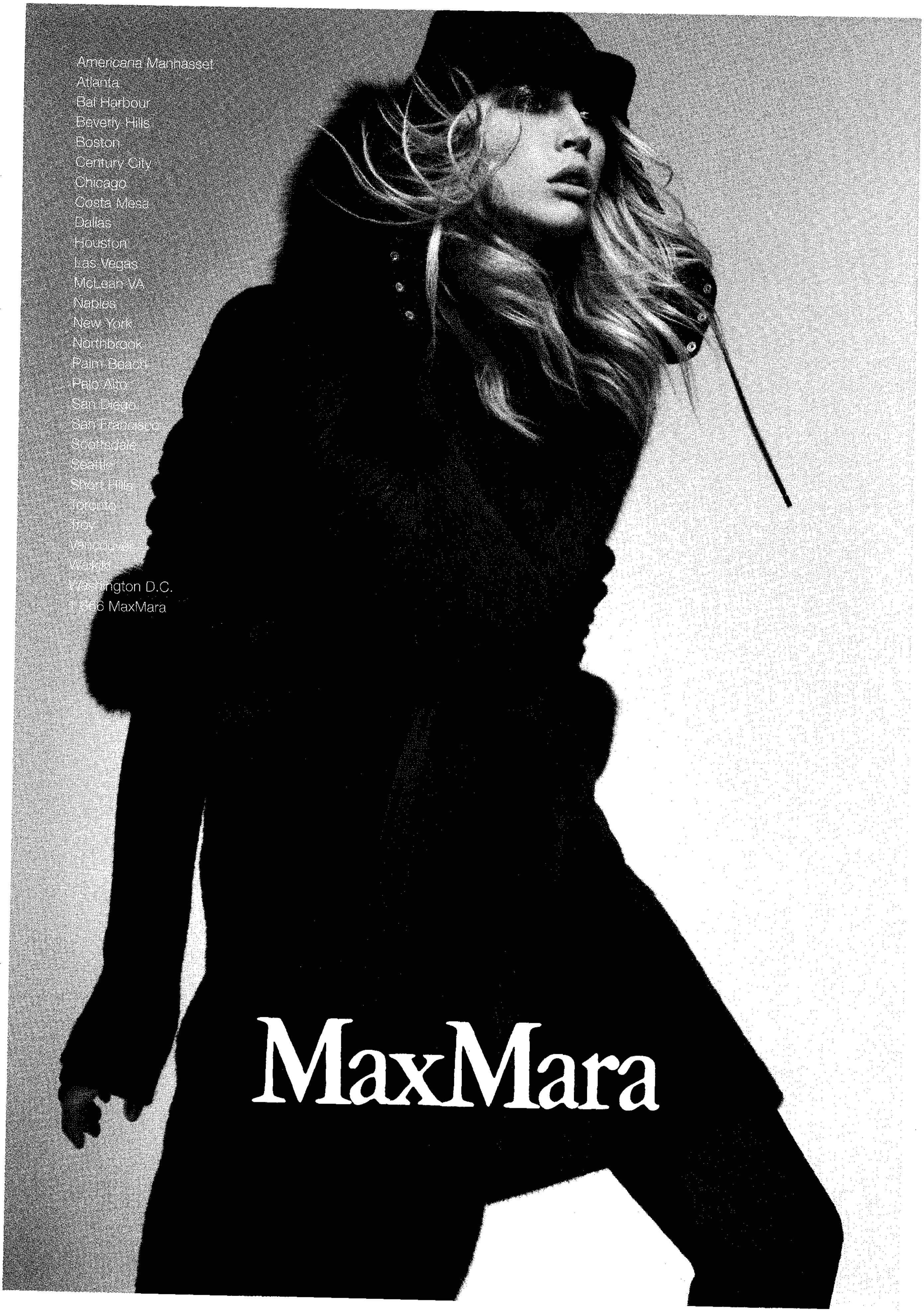
NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery."** The museum's first foray into contemporary art explores an ignoble history. Much of the work is familiar to art initiates: Betye Saar's assemblages using racist Americana and memorabilia, Carrie Mae Weems's photoconceptual arrangements, Glenn Ligon's word paintings, Kara Walker's ever-effective silhouettes. Fred Wilson revisits the formula of his famous 1992 exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society, which employed objects from the collection to critique history and institutions. (The installation here couples marble busts of George Washington with a tobacco-shop figurine of an African-American man.) Context is everything, and this gathering of works, in this setting, offers a complex critique both of monolithic historical narratives and the ways in which American slavery has gone largely unaddressed in official and public venues. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Elegy in the Dust: September 11 and the Chelsea Jeans Memorial."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The human body is put through its paces—and beyond—in **"Into Me/Out of Me,"** a conceptual survey of art from the past forty years by more than a hundred and thirty artists, including Car-

DUPUY-BERBERIAN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olee Schneemann, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Marina Abramović, Kiki Smith, Cindy Sherman, Matthew Barney, and Catherine Opie. This is not, by any means, a polite exhibition, but it fulfills in many ways the edicts of the figurative tradition, since even Leonardo, in one of his darker, less humanist moments, described the body as a mere vessel through which things pass. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Time Frame."** Through Oct. 2. ♦ **"Ron Gorchov: Double Trouble."** Gorchov comes from the sixties school of post-minimalist thinking wherein it's O.K. to combine mocking, hippie irreverence for "official" art issues with actual, serious considerations of them. In his case, the issue is the divide between painting and sculpture, broached with austerity by Donald Judd and playful jocularity by Richard Tuttle (and, of course, by Frank Stella, who falls somewhere in between). This survey of Gorchov's recent career shows he's remained true to the cause, probing the boundaries of painting and sculpture with a mind toward merging them. Given their placement on walls, and despite their signature sculptural convex/concave saddle/shield shape, his works lean more toward painting, although his single-mindedness with regard to the 2-D versus 3-D problem becomes, at times, a little stultifying. Through Nov. 20. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEEN SOFÍA SPANISH INSTITUTE
684 Park Ave., at 68th St. (212-628-0420)—**"Ràfols-Casamada Paintings 1950-2005."** Through Sept. 29. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—Felt-covered speakers line one eleven-by-forty-five-foot wall of gallery space in a new installation by Nadine Robinson. The arcing placement of woofers and tweeters mimics the composition of saints in Michelangelo's epic "Last Judgment" fresco, but they emit a rumbling soundtrack of audio clips from horror films like "Rosemary's Baby" and "The Omen" mixed with fifteenth-century Gregorian chants. The whole thing carries an overwrought German title: **"Alles Grau in Grau Malen,"** or "everything is painted gray." Robinson's exercise in *Gesamptkunstwerk* excess lacks any wink of irony, but it's a cogent reminder that cathedrals were originally all about bombast and spectacle and blowing viewers away with visual and aural theatrics. Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"Quid Pro Quo,"** an exhibition of work by S.M.H.'s 2005–06 Artists-in-Residence, Rashawn Griffin, Karyn Olivier, and Clifford Owens. Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

ANISH KAPOOR
Kapoor's "Sky Mirror"—a concave disk made of polished stainless steel, measuring thirty-five feet in diameter, weighing twenty-three tons, and standing nearly three stories tall—will apply the perceptual tricks of eighteenth-century landscape painting to the curtain of midtown skyscrapers around Rockefeller Plaza. Opens Sept. 19. (Public Art Fund, Rockefeller Center, Fifth Ave. at 50th St. 212-980-4575.)

MALERIE MARDER
Marder, who has often used herself, her boyfriend, and her parents as raw material for her staged photographs, focusses on her own pregnancy in a sequence of nine massive images called, redundantly, "Nine." The artist appears in each of the pictures, often in the nude, but her approach is far from documentary. Instead, she creates an emotionally charged, fitfully believable fiction that might be called reality photography. There are moments of awkward melodrama here, but they're balanced by several unpretentious tours de force, including one of the artist standing behind the sunlit spray of a lawn sprinkler and another, at once modest and magnificent, of her naked torso in her seventh month. Through Oct. 7. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444.)

CRISTIÁN SILVA
Silva's high-concept installation uses another art work as its catalyst: Mozart's last opera, "The Magic Flute." The opera's comic figure, Papageno, who catches birds and carries them in a cage strapped to his back, is represented as a blocky, Joel Shapiro-esque figure with wings. A genie's lamp covered with tar is an ostensible link to the conjuring of allusions, while a video

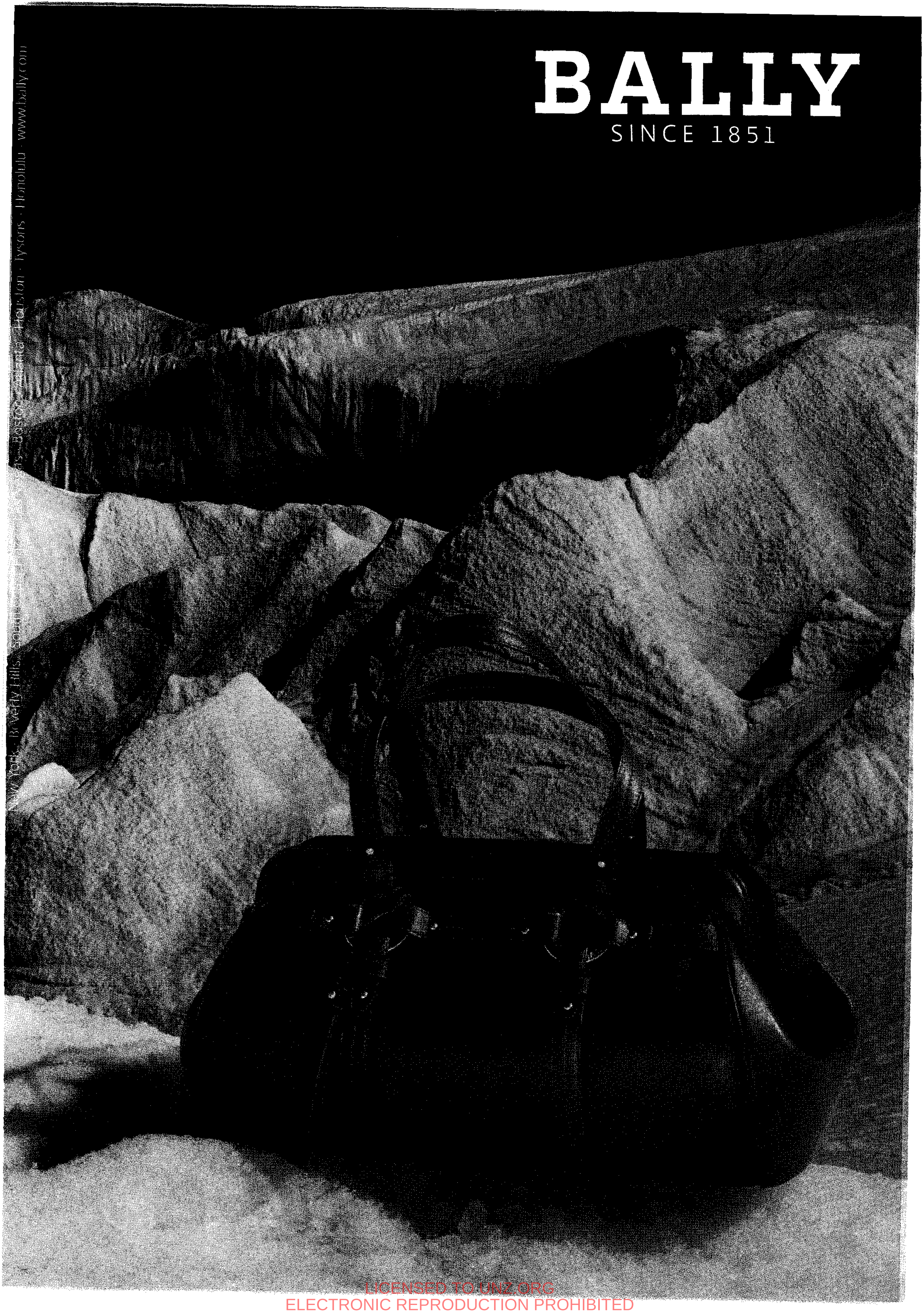
TABLES FOR TWO
USHIWAKAMARU

136 W. Houston St. (212-228-4181)—Ushiwakamaru is the childhood name for a legendary twelfth-century Japanese warrior hero, and Hideo Kuriba ra, a brawny figure with a shaved head and a booming laugh, has just the kind of Toshiro Mifune bravado that makes you feel that his long sushi knife could be put to other uses if necessary. This is not one of those restaurants with a templelike calm. It's more in the style, one customer said, of the places that surround Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market—serving superlative fish in a rough-and-ready manner. Kuribara and his two assistants banter with the diners along the bar, the menu looks as if it had been through a wash cycle folded up in someone's back pocket, and a notice at the entrance tells ignorant Westerners not to rub their chopsticks together or dunk wasabi in the soy sauce.

Probably the best way to experience the place is to sit at the counter and order the *omakase*, allowing Kuribara to decide what cuts of fish to serve. The quality of the fish, if not quite on the level of midtown's pricier sushi palaces, is impressive, as is the variety. Curiosities here include saury, halfbeak, and sweetfish—a Japanese freshwater species that is sardinelike in appearance but almost fruity in taste. There is also the alarmingly named "live shrimp." Only the head is served, but a waitress said that shrimp remain alive for a few minutes after decapitation. It's not clear that the final flickerings of a crustacean consciousness really add much to the experience, but Kuribara seems to have quite a thing for shrimp heads. Even an apparently innocuous miso soup had one bobbing cheekily to the surface.

Other surprises on the menu include *chawan mushi*—a small pot of steamed egg custard, salty and creamy, containing ginkgo nut, honeywort, and fish—and flaming turban shell, inverted to become its own cauldron. It tends to run out quite early in the evening, because the restaurant, which has been open a little more than a year, has a loyal following among Japanese and Japanophile customers, who throng the bar most nights and fall upon the rarer items with the zeal of the truly homesick. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Sushi entrées $17-$39.50.)

—*Leo Carey*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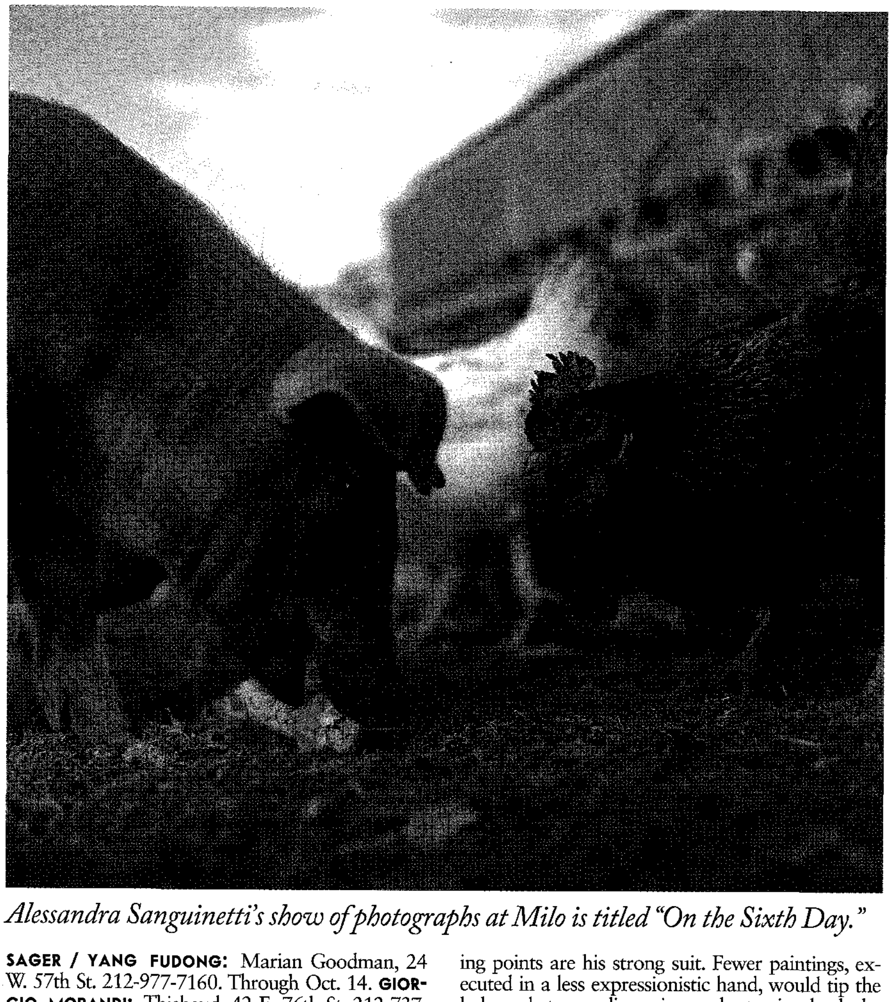
of jiggling mercury projected inside a rococo mantel drawn on the wall nods to alchemy and eighteenth-century aesthetics. The real quarry for Silva is purportedly Mozart's Masonic references (the composer joined the Freemasons in 1784) and the coincidental links to Silva's own work. The sub-rosa connections remain hidden in this deeply self-referential exercise, but the sculptures and video are pleasant to look at. Through Sept. 29. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD
A placard explains that "Damski Czepek," von Rydingsvard's outdoor sculpture in Madison Square Park, is meant to monumentalize an emblem of childhood, the stringed and ruffled bonnet. In fact, the walk-in structure, built in rough-hewn blocks of smoky cast polyurethane, looks more like a half-igloo or grotto with low, out-flung walls (the cap strings). Iconographic muddles notwithstanding, it's an appealing piece, with chiaroscuro sunlight filtering through the plastic blocks as if through translucent stone or clouded mirrors. Three other sculptures, all in cedar, are scattered throughout the park. Through Dec. 31. (Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 23rd St. 212-538-6667.)

Short List

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER: Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470. Through Oct. 28. **ELINOR CARUCCI:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Oct. 21. **WALKER EVANS:** UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885. Through Nov. 17. **ANNETTE MESSAGER / YANG FUDONG:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 14. **GIORGIO MORANDI:** Thiebaud, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9759. Through Oct. 28. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **SARAH SZE:** Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, 60th St. at Fifth Ave. 212-980-4575. Through Oct. 22. **CHARLES H. TRAUB:** Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Opens Sept. 22. **ANDY WARHOL:** L & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through Oct. 7. **ALEXI WORTH:** Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Oct. 7. **"LANDSCAPE IN YOUR MIND":** Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 E. 52nd St. 212-319-5300. Through Oct. 28.



Alessandra Sanguinetti's show of photographs at Milo is titled "On the Sixth Day."

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JOHN BRILL
Brill's photographs, always teetering on the edge of visibility, have often seemed like figments of his imagination. That's no less true of his latest series, a group of thirty-nine very small images derived from snapshots he made before he turned ten. Brill's subjects are mundane but rarely childish and include swimmers, railway tracks, a man on a tractor, stark suburban homes, a dog's head, and a leaping figure. The latter picture recalls Jacques-Henri Lartigue, but Brill dissolves innocent joie de vivre in a snowy haze that suggests a bad TV picture or the deep recesses of memory. The effect is part dreamy, part disturbing—childhood watchfulness reprocessed as adult anxiety. Through Oct. 14. (Kent, 541 W. 25th St. 212-627-3680.)

DEREK BUCKNER
Buckner's oil paintings are pastiches of video clips, obsessed with the looping Nowheresville of freeway on-ramps, cloverleafs, and airplane approach paths over low-slung suburbs. Buckner has a nice feel, compositionally, for the menacing blandness of his subject matter—as the exhibition's title, "American Perspectives," suggests, sight lines and vanishing points are his strong suit. Fewer paintings, executed in a less expressionistic hand, would tip the balance between dispassion and attention back the right way; as it is, for a show about impersonal coolness, the room feels overcrowded and overheated. Through Oct. 7. (Billis, 511 W. 25th St. 212-645-2621.)

JOSEPH KOSUTH
A new installation by the iconic conceptualist takes inspiration from a 1969 text by Michel Foucault. In keeping with Kosuth's language-based art, here he follows the French theorist through "a labyrinth into which I can venture"—i.e., writing. Opens Sept. 19. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

KEEGAN MCHARGUE
Paintings by a twenty-four-year-old San Francisco-based artist whose psychedelic images, full of floating heads and Eastern-ish motifs, could be mistaken for the work of an outsider artist. Opens Sept. 21. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

ESKO MÄNNIKKÖ
Perhaps because this Finnish photographer hasn't had a U.S. show for nearly a decade, he's interspersed work from three recent series made in his country's rural north with earlier pictures from São Paolo and Texas. The result is eccentric, engaging, and so generous in its embrace of the wide world that one is tempted to move in. Männikkö's practice of hanging his color photos end to end so their beat-up found frames form a continuous row around the gallery underlines this sense of global community and unites environmental portraits, ramshackle interiors, and some startling closeups of farm animals in one extended tribute to life (and death) on the margins. Through Oct. 21. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

MARY MISS
A pioneer of blurring sculpture with architecture and landscape design offers a series of collages that serve as idiosyncratic documents of canals, mineheads, bell towers, and other structures in the American landscape. Opens Sept. 20. (Senior & Shopmaker, 21 E. 26th St. 212-213-6767.)

KEN PRICE
A gallery retrospective replete with sculptures and drawings from 1962 to the present by an artist integral to the Los Angeles art scene, and one of the few ceramists to infiltrate the Chelsea contemporary art world. Opens Sept. 23. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

MATTHEW RITCHIE
Pomo fabulist Ritchie presents his first New York gallery show in four years, a bi-level installation involving a thirty-foot latticework, a massive wall of illuminated images, a suspended viewing platform, and an oculus through which viewers can peep into another fantastical image projection. Opens Sept. 21. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI
Sanguinetti's color photographs were made on small farms in Argentina and focus almost exclusively on the livestock and domestic animals she encountered there. Unsentimental and far from squeamish, she engages her subject at close range and more often than not at ground level, with an intimacy that is no less genuine when the animal has been skinned and hung out to dry. Sanguinetti noses right into the bloody mess of farm life—the slaughtered cow, the stillborn calf—but, like the dogs, cats, and chickens that are frequent observers of the carnage, passes no judgment. Her interspecies empathy doesn't exclude the few humans here, which makes the work richer, deeper, and all the more moving. Through Oct. 14. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

Short List

DONALD BAECHLER: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Oct. 28. **CÉLESTE BOURSIER-MOUGENOT:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Oct. 21. **LOLA ALVAREZ BRAVO:** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Through Nov. 2. **JEFF BROUWS:** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600. Through Oct. 14. **BARNABY FURNAS:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Oct. 21. **STUART HAWKINS:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Sept. 23. **MICHAEL HEIZER:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through Sept. 23. **JESPER JUST:** Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000. Through Oct. 28. **KAREN KILIMNIK:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 4. **REINER**

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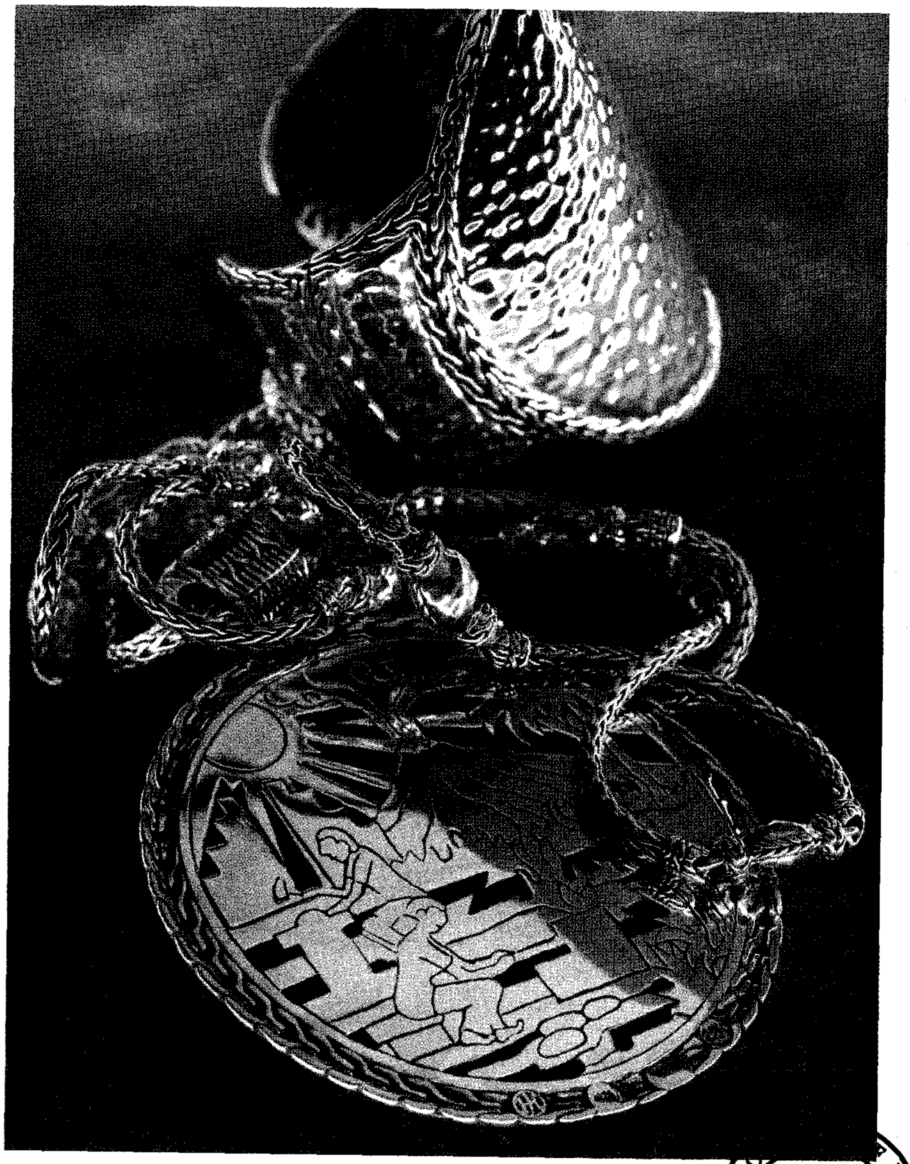

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LEIST: Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Oct. 14. **NICOLA LÓPEZ:** Golden, 539 W. 23rd St. 212-727-8304. Through Oct. 14. **JOHN MCCRACKEN / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 14. **ADAM MCEWEN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Oct. 14. **VIK MUNIZ:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Oct. 14. **AMY MYERS:** Weiss, 520 W. 24th St. 212-691-6899. Through Oct. 7. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through Oct. 21. **CATHERINE OPIE:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Oct. 14. **KAY ROSEN:** Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611. Through Oct. 21. **ERICH SALOMON / CHRISTOPHER MORRIS:** Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006. Through Oct. 7. **LUCAS SAMARAS:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Oct 7. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Sept. 23. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Oct. 14. **BEAT STREULI:** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through Oct. 21. **CHRIS VERENE:** Kagan, 540 W. 29th St. 212-560-0670. Through Oct. 28. **"LEAST WANTED: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MUGSHOTS":** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

AARON YOUNG

Young travels a territory somewhere between Chris Burden's performances, Robert Smithson's non-site sculptures, and the beloved "trace" of Abstract Expressionism. Safety-glass panels show the silhouette of Young's body, surrounded by a spray of rubber from a motorcyclist's tires; painted bronze "curbs" carry marks from where skateboarders screeched across their edges; a trio of Rorschachish tondo paintings depend on the after-image seen with closed eyes after staring at a series of dots. Here, the ideas of "trace" are mixed with extreme action and infusions of street cred, and the exhibition's socially conscious title, "1%," which nods to the extremes of wealth and poverty in this country, falls a bit flat. But Young, who blasted out of art school into P.S. 1's "Greater New York" and last spring's Whitney Biennial, has energy and bravado to spare. Through Oct. 14. (Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290.)

"MOVING PICTURES: AMERICAN ART AND EARLY FILM, 1880-1910"

Paintings by George Bellows, Thomas Eakins, Childe Hassam, Maurice Prendergast, William Merritt Chase, John Singer Sargent, and others are shown alongside films by Edison and the Lumière Brothers in an attempt to uncover how the earliest generations of filmgoing artists responded to the burgeoning technology. Through Dec. 9. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

"NEO-CON: CONTEMPORARY RETURNS TO CONCEPTUAL ART"

Jonathan Monk, João Onofre, Francesco Vezzoli, and other artists reimagine classic conceptual art works as media spectacles. Through Oct. 14. (ApexArt, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

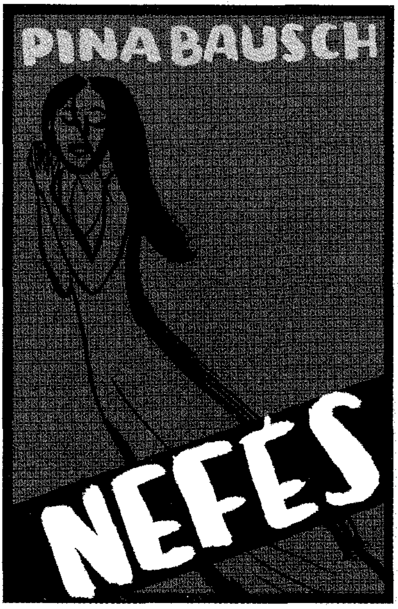
Short List

ELE D'ARTAGNAN: KS Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through Oct. 7. **MICHEL GONDRY:** Deitch, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300. Through Sept. 30. **JANE SOUTH:** Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455. Through Oct. 14.

DANCE

ELISA MONTE DANCE

The Joyce opens its fall season with Elisa Monte's company, now in its twenty-fifth year. Monte, who danced with Martha Graham for eight years, as well as with Pilobolus and Lar Lubovitch, draws from these and other modern-dance sources for her visceral style, which is fed by sexual energy and is echoed in her choice of music (often in the minimalist vein). In her trio "Volkmann Suite," the dancers slither and cling, twining limbs and torsos, momentarily forming convoluted poses; in "Day's Residue," Monte explores formalized social gestures, peeling them down to their subconscious meanings. The company will also perform a new piece, "Hardwood," for eight dancers, set to the music of John King. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Sept. 19-20 at 7:30, Sept. 21-23 at 8, and Sept. 24 at 2 and 7:30.)



DUPUY-BERBERIAN

DANCE PREVIEW

The fall dance season features performances and events with several star choreographers.

"FALL FOR DANCE"

The eclectic two-year-old festival (Sept. 28-Oct. 8)—in which thirty companies from around the world offer samples of their work—includes the Dutch National Ballet, Bill T. Jones, Stephen Petronio Company, Martha Graham Dance Company, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Honvéd Dance Company, and Christopher Williams, to name but a few.

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER/ AKRAM KHAN

In a seventieth-birthday tribute to the minimalist composer Steve Reich at BAM (Oct. 3-7), the edgy Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker presents her duet from 1982, "Fase," set to music by Reich, and the British dancer and choreographer Akram Khan has the U.S. première of his "Variations for Vibes, Pianos and Strings."

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Highlights of A.B.T.'s fall season (Oct. 18-Nov. 5), at City Center, include the première of a new work by Jorma Elo, Mark Morris's exquisite ballet for twelve dancers "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," Twyla Tharp's sentimental favorite "Sinatra Suite," and Lar Lubovitch's ethereal "Meadow."

SARAH MICHELSON

Michelson (Oct. 18-21), who is known for rendering performance spaces unrecognizable, makes her BAM début with "Dogs," a piece that was commissioned specifically for BAM's Harvey Theatre.

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

At City Center (Nov. 29-Dec. 31), the company's season includes the euphoric "Golden Section," from Twyla Tharp's "The Catherine Wheel," and the world première of Karole Armitage's "Gamelan Gardens."

PINA BAUSCH

The intelligent, mercurial European choreographer showcases "Nefés" ("Breath"), her ode to Istanbul—set to Turkish tunes, classical guitar, tangos, and Tom Waits, which she created during a three-week residency in Turkey—at BAM (Dec. 8-16).

"AGORA II"

The site-specific choreographer Noémie LaFrance returns to the vast, empty pool in Greenpoint's McCarren Park. This time, to fill the massive space, LaFrance's troupe teams with dancers from Streb, the Young Dance Collective, Celeste Hastings and the Butoh Rockettes, and many others. Select audience members are invited to perform unison moves they've learned in advance on the company's Web site. Bora Yoon directs the live music as dancers swarm the pool and the featured characters—including an astronaut, a waitress, a butcher, and a roller skater—emerge. Meanwhile, a beat-boxer flies by on a bicycle, a stuntwoman breaks boards, a bunch of movers carry furniture, and people dash in with buckets of water, filling an inflatable pool. (Lorimer St. at Driggs St., Brooklyn. 718-388-6309. Sept. 20-23 at 8. Through Sept. 30.)

CONSTANZA MACRAS / DORKY PARK

The Argentine-born, Berlin-based choreographer makes her U.S. début this week, but this onetime student of the Merce Cunningham Studio and Movement Research is no stranger to New York dance. "Back to the Present," a frenzied, bohemian "performance happening," unfolds on a stage strewn with the detritus of past lives—old love letters and ticket stubs, discarded props and costumes. The fourteen members of Macras's troupe dance and make live rock music among the ruins; at one point, they vie for slots on an imaginary reality show. A sequence of intense videos adds to the chaotic, trashy atmosphere. Part of the European Dream Festival. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Sept. 21-23 at 7:30.)

MARIANA BEKERMAN DANCE COMPANY

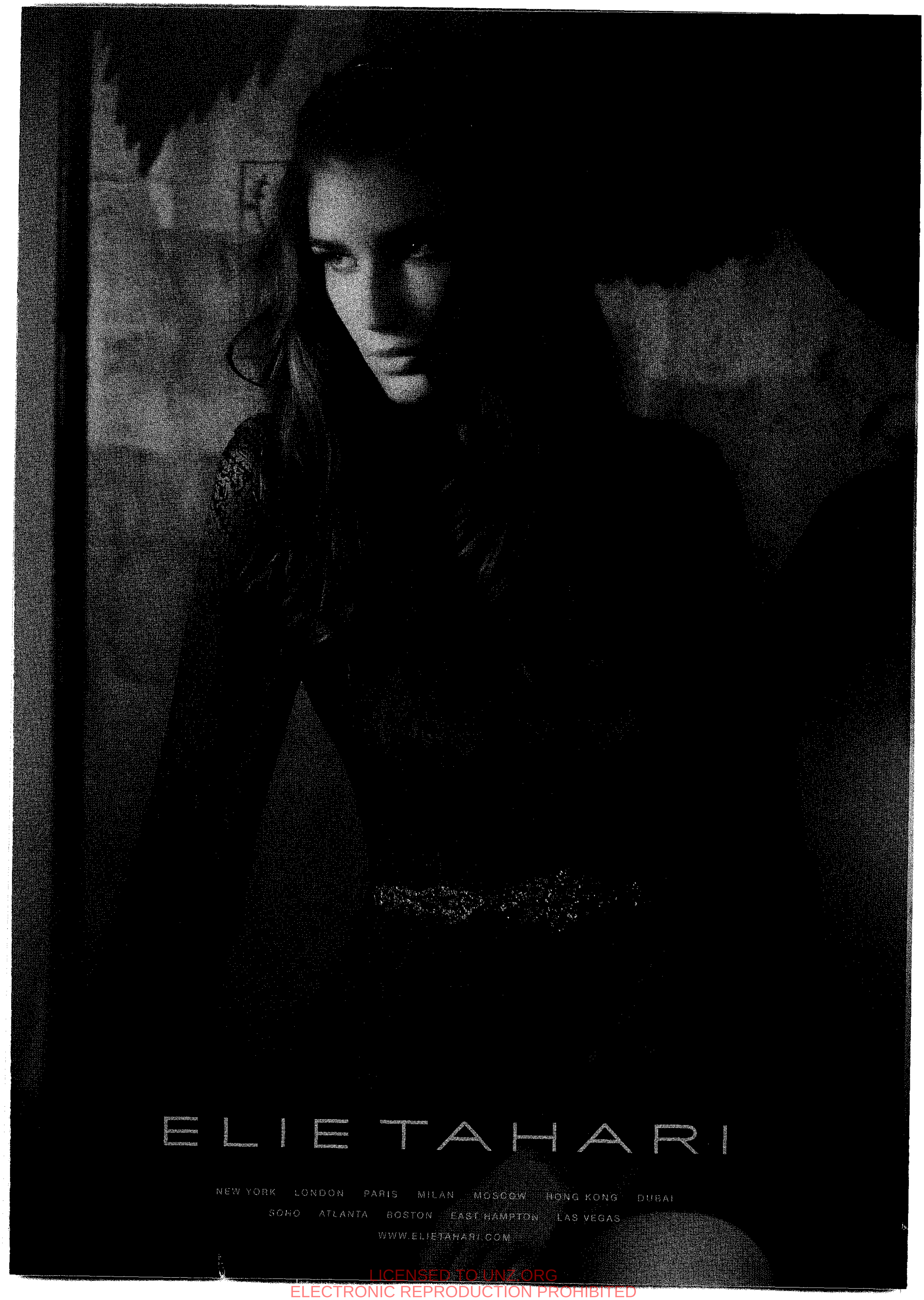
"Taro," a new evening-length piece about a woman doing battle with her inner demons, is anything but minimal. Three composers contributed to the original electronic score; three choreographers (Bekerman, Rebekah J. Kennedy, and the Japanese artist Keiko Fujii) created segments of the dance, and various dancers take turns portraying the central character. On Bekerman's supple dancers, her unexpected, often quirky movement is eye-catching, providing points of light in an otherwise grim atmosphere. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Sept. 21-24 at 8.)

"LUNA"

Max Luna III, who once danced with the Alvin Ailey company and has long taught at the school, presents an evening of his own choreography. His pickup company of strong, expansive, Ailey-like dancers is multicultural without belaboring the fact, and his dances are striated with unstressed moments of beauty. Selections include the Gershwin tribute "American Rhapsody" and "Cold Song," Luna's tribute to Ailey, along with two works drawing from Luna's Filipino heritage: a love-song cycle by the Filipino composer Michael Dadap (performed live), and a contemporary reimagining of rituals still enacted by the Igorot tribe of the northern Philippines. (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University. 212-868-4444. Sept. 22-23 at 8.)

NEW CHAMBER BALLET

The choreographer Miro Magloire (of Haitian background, born and raised in Munich) began his training in piano and composition, and still works as an accompanist for American Ballet Theatre. His chamber company of seven includes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a pianist and a violinist, who are part of the collaborative process. At City Center Studio 4, they will perform a new work by Magloire, set to the moody "Tartiniana Seconda," by Luigi Dallapiccola, as well as two of his earlier works and the new "Terzetto," a lyrical portrait of three dancers in a dance studio by the guest choreographer Constantine Baecher (currently a member of the Royal Danish Ballet), set to Scriabin piano études. (130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 23 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Peter Gelb begins his stewardship of the Met with a daring move, replacing the usual opening-night opera-highlights performance with the début of a new production of **"Madama Butterfly,"** by Anthony Minghella, which will make use of Bunraku-style puppets, traditional shoji screens, and, presumably, the director's rich yet decorous romanticism. Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, a star on the rise, sings the title role, joined by two more seasoned performers, Marcello Giordani and Dwayne Croft; James Levine conducts. (Sept. 25 at 6:30.) ♦ To follow a brand-new "Butterfly" with a revival of Margherita Wallmann's 1966 production of **"La Gioconda"**—safely in mothballs for fifteen years—is so conservative it's almost hip. (New choreography from Christopher Wheeldon will liven things up.) Ponchielli's Venetian melodrama is full of famous tunes—there'd be no "Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh" without the "Dance of the Hours"—but notoriously demanding for the voices. The cast, headed by Violeta Urmana, Olga Borodina, and Aquiles Machado, is impressive; Bertrand de Billy. (Sept. 26 at 7:30.) ♦ Note: In another break from tradition, the company holds its first-ever open house, an all-day event that will include not only discussions with the technical staff and the production team of "Madama Butterfly" but also an opportunity to see the final dress rehearsal of the work. (Sept. 22, beginning at 9 A.M. Free tickets, limited to two per customer, which are required, will be available at the box office beginning at 10 A.M. on Sept. 20.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

Rinat Shaham, a petite but potent mezzo-soprano, is City Opera's latest cigarette girl of choice in **"Carmen,"** in performances that also feature Latonia Moore (as Micaëla), Mark Duffin, and Adrian Gans; Ari Pelto conducts. (Sept. 20 at 7:30.) ♦ The invigorating James Robinson production of **"La Bohème,"** with Shu-Ying Li, Elizabeth Caballero, James Valenti, and Daniel Mobbs; George Manahan. (Sept. 21 at 7:30 and Sept. 23 at 1:30.) ♦ The company has long made a strong case for the operas of Handel; this season brings a new production of **"Semele,"** a late English-language work, featuring two radiant young American singers, Elizabeth Futral (in the title role) and Vivica Genaux (making her company début); Antony Walker. (Sept. 23 at 8.) ♦ The Frank Corsaro production of **"Die Tote Stadt"** cunningly employs films and projections (by Ronald Chase) to help define the levels of dream and reality in Erich Wolfgang Korngold's pseudo-Freudian drama, a romantic triangle set in Bruges at the end of the nineteenth century. The quasi-Straussian score, however, is a delight. It will be sung by a cast headed by Susan B. Anthony, Dan Chamandy (in his début), and Weston Hurt; Manahan. (Sept. 24 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS

This valuable company offers a chance to look in on operas in progress by talented lyric composers. The latest round features concert readings of works by James Borchers, David Claman, Conrad Cummings ("The Golden Gate," adapted from the verse novel by Vikram Seth), Jeff Grace, Hannah Lash, and Gilda Lyons. (South Oxford Space, 138 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 718-398-4024. Sept. 22-23 at 7:30.)

AMATO OPERA

Anthony Amato's feisty semi-professional company, a fixture of the Lower East Side, offers performances of classics—in its intimate theatre—with the hardy enthusiasm of an Italian hill-town troupe. The season opens with an English-language **"Marriage of Figaro."** (319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Sept. 23 at 7:30 and Sept. 24 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

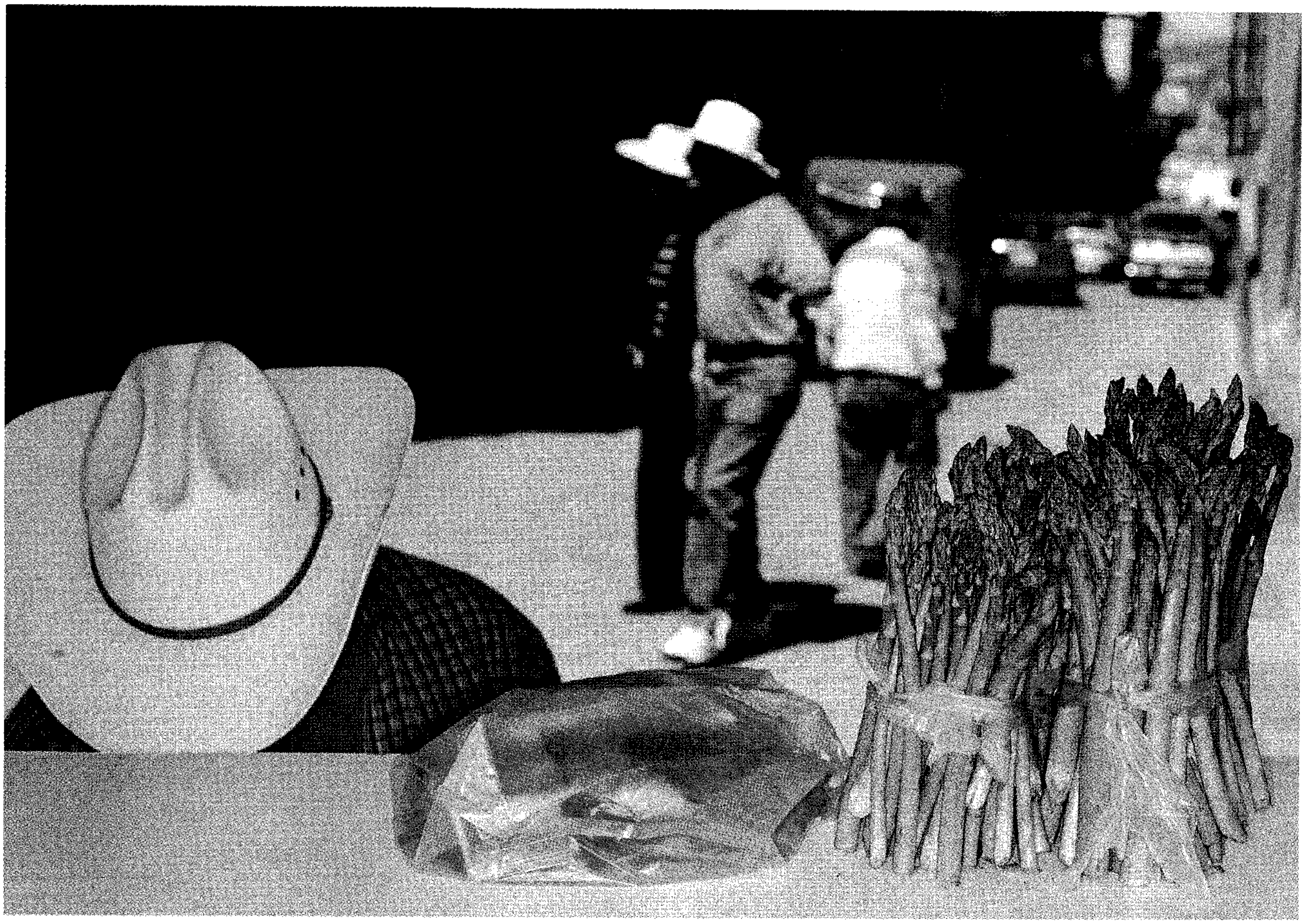
NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Heidi Grant Murphy, a lyric soprano of extraordinary grace and versatility, is the soloist in Mahler's Fourth Symphony, as well as in Mozart's "Exsultate, Jubilate," a joyous little motet. Weber's overture to "Oberon" begins the program; Lorin Maazel conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Sept. 20-21 and Sept. 26 at 7:30 and Sept. 22 at 11 A.M.)

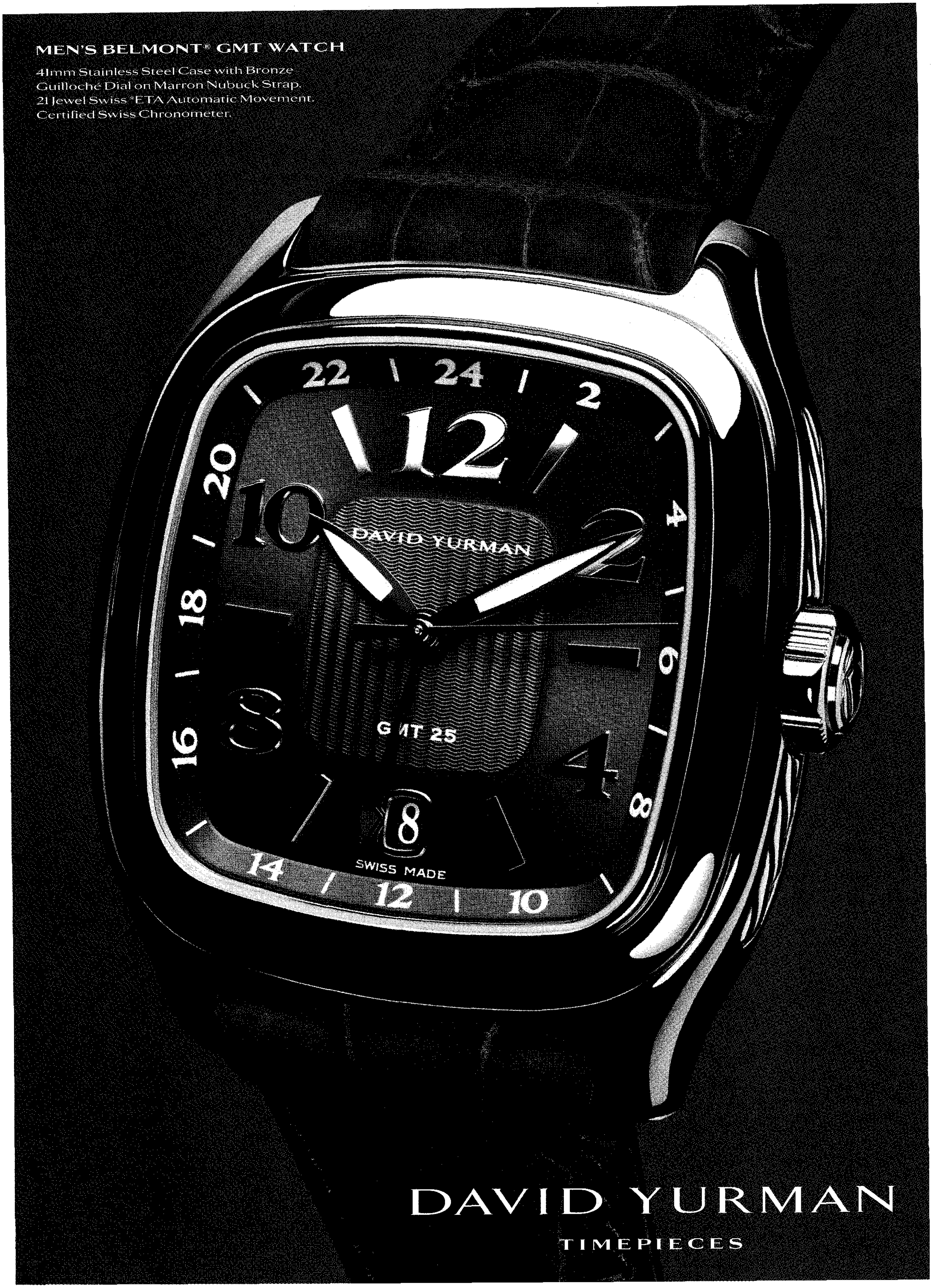
RECITALS

MIDTOWN CONCERTS: ENSEMBLE BREVE

Gwendolyn Toth, the harpsichordist and the director of the longtime series, accompanies the



Janet Borden will open a show of recent work by the British photographer Martin Parr on Oct. 22. This untitled shot, part of a series taken in Mexico between 2002 and 2004 documenting American influence there, will be among the images on view.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NEW YORK ATLANTA BAL HARBOUR DALLAS HOUSTON LAS VEGAS MANHASSET ORLANDO SOUTH COAST PLAZA

wind player Deborah Booth and the violinist-violist Louise Schulman in a little lunchtime concert of works by Telemann. (Church of St. Francis of Assisi, 135 W. 31st St. Sept. 20 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society, home to New York's chamber-music masters (and their talented protégés), begins its season with a tasting menu of samplings from what should be an elegant and adventurous season. Short works by Vivaldi, Brahms (the plangent Two Songs with Viola, Op. 91), Debussy, Bright Sheng, and Leon Kirchner form a prelude to a performance of Dvořák's String Quintet in E-Flat Major; the performers include the soprano Amy Burton, the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, the flutist Paula Robison, and the cellist David Finckel. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Sept. 21 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Sept. 21-22 at 7:30: Steven Beck, a prominent pianist at the floating chamber-music series, performs preludes and fugues by Bach and Shostakovich, along with a trio of Mozart sonatas. ♦ Sept. 23 at 7:30 and Sept. 24 at 4: Beck is joined by the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Eric Jacobsen, and other musicians for an all-Shostakovich concert that features two favorite works, the Piano Trio No. 2 and the Piano Quintet. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ROULETTE
An improvisational set offered by the bassist Mark Dresser and the electronic sound artist Raz Mesinai starts out a new round of concerts in the experimental-music series, which has moved to roomier headquarters at 20 Greene Street, in SoHo. (212-219-8242. Sept. 21 at 8:30. For full schedule, see www.roulette.org.)

THE KITCHEN
Real musical performances seem to be making a comeback at the avant-garde performance space, a crucial sector of the downtown scene. The Berlin-based artist Carsten Nicolai—whose compositional persona is Alva Noto—performs the New York première of "Xerrox," an event mixing laptop-generated waves of minimalist, techno, and hip-hop-influenced sound and video projections. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Sept. 23 at 8.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
The Jens Nygaard tribute series, extending the late conductor's taste for music on the margins of the standard repertory, continues with a concert of works by Mendelssohn, Kuhlau, Beethoven (the obscure Piano Quartet in D Major, WoO36, No. 2), and the once renowned Romantic Joachim Raff (the String Octet). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Sept. 25 at 2 and 7:30.)

"SOUND OF SONG" SERIES
Thomas Bagwell, a noted accompanist (and Metropolitan Opera coach) backs up the soprano Sharla Nafziger and the baritone Keith Phares in a program of songs by the Austrian Romantics Schubert and Marx, along with several of their American successors (Lee Hoiby, Lowell Liebermann, and Mason Bates), in the Austrian Cultural Forum's stylish little concert hall. (11 E. 52nd St. Sept. 25 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300, ext. 222.)

POP NOTES
CRAZY FROM LOVE

Reading art as autobiography is a dicey business, but even a disinterested formalist will get the impression from Beyoncé's new album, **"B'Day"** (Columbia), that some fool has done her all kinds of wrong. Released one day after her twenty-fifth birthday and entering at the top of the charts, "B'Day" is a short, sharp blast of harried music. In ten songs and thirty-eight minutes—not counting the irrelevant bonus track, "Listen," tied to her performance in the upcoming film version of "Dreamgirls"—Beyoncé calls out a man who has underestimated her. Even "Freakum Dress," a putatively upbeat song about wearing a "short and backless" garment just so someone will remove it, starts with bilious scene-setting: "I think I'm ready, been locked up in the house way too long / It's time to get it, 'cause once again he's out doing wrong." Par-tay.

Elsewhere, "Kitty Kat" sounds like smooth R. & B. but returns again and again to doubt: "You know I hate sleeping alone, but you said that you would soon be home. But baby, that was a long time ago." And even the giddy, dancehall-inspired romp "Get Me Bodied" sounds anxious: "Can you get me bodied? I want to be myself tonight." Beyoncé's voice strains more than once; notes that begin as legato exhalations constrict into shouts, as if she couldn't control her usually disciplined and gorgeous instrument. This heartbreak works especially well in combination with music provided by the producer Swizz Beatz and also on those tracks produced by Rich Harrison, Beyoncé's collaborator for the 2003 hit "Crazy in Love," a magnificent duet with her boyfriend, Jay-Z. Ahem. Not that he has anything to do with all of this.

Maybe to strengthen his alibi, Jay-Z appears on "B'Day" twice, first on the leaden single "Déjà Vu" and then on the equally middling "Upgrade U." "Déjà Vu" takes a particularly perplexing view of memory: "Is it because I'm missing you that I'm having déjà vu?" Why would you be trying to remember the person standing right in front of you? Perhaps the answer is in the final words of the last song, "Resentment," a fierce ballad built around a honeyed sample from Curtis Mayfield's "Superfly" album: "How could you lie?" But, hey, they're just songs, right?

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

MOVIES OPENING

ALL THE KING'S MEN
Steven Zaillian wrote and directed this adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's novel about a Southern demagogue, starring Sean Penn, Jude Law, Kate Winslet, Anthony Hopkins, and Mark Ruffalo. Opening Sept. 22. (In wide release.)

AMERICAN HARDCORE
A documentary, directed by Paul Rachman, about rock music in the nineteen-eighties. Opening Sept. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

FEARLESS
A martial-arts drama, starring Jet Li and directed by Ronny Yu. Opening Sept. 22. (In wide release.)

JACKASS: NUMBER TWO
The sick-stunt sequel, starring Johnny Knoxville. Directed by Jeff Tremaine. Opening Sept. 22. (In wide release.)

JESUS CAMP
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 22. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

OLD JOY
A drama, directed by Kelly Reichardt, about two baby-boomer political-idealist friends (Daniel London and Will Oldham) whose paths have diverged and who reunite for a weekend trip in the wilderness. Opening Sept. 20. (Film Forum.)

RENAISSANCE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 22. (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 22. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

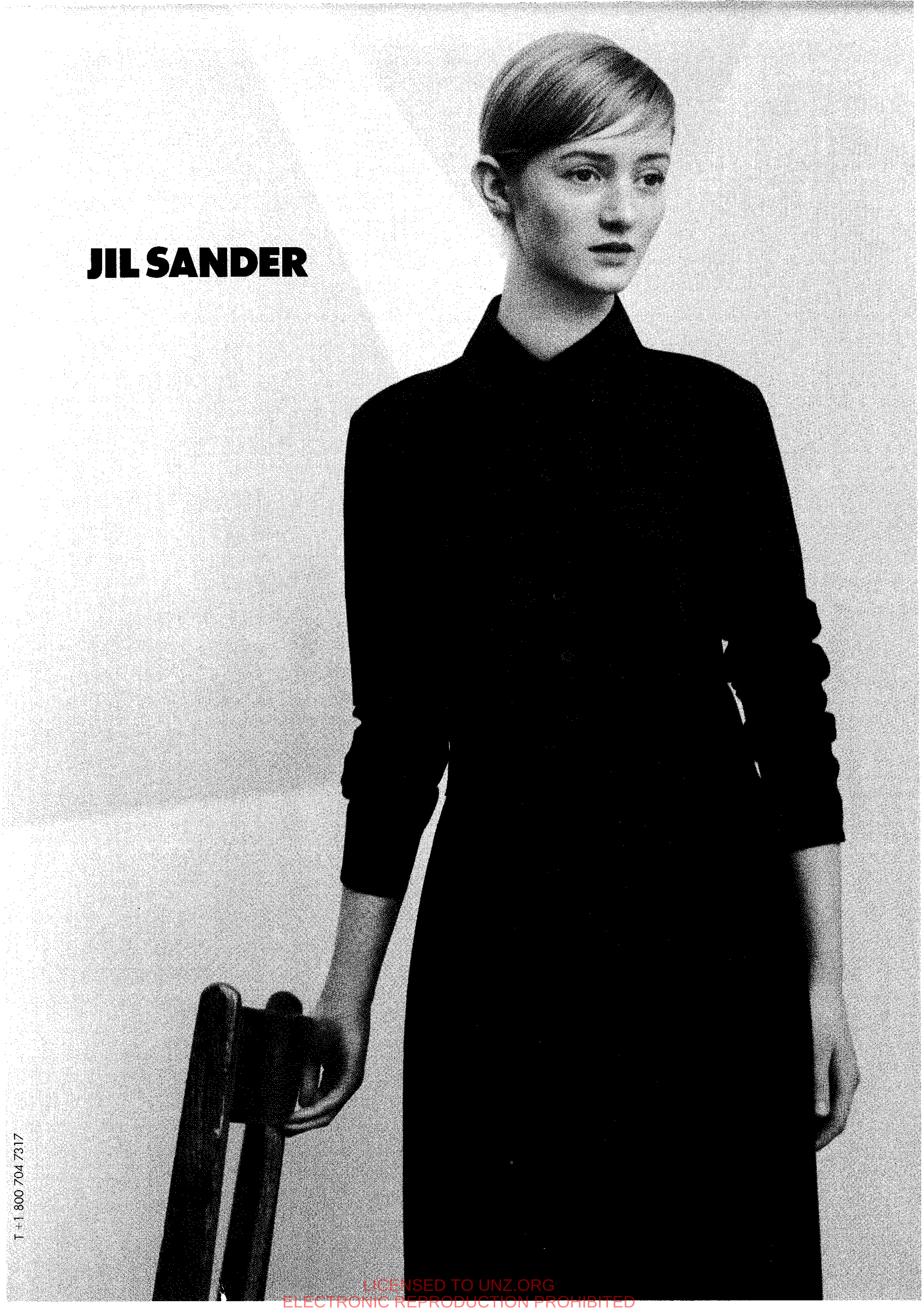
NOW PLAYING

THE BLACK DAHLIA
This Brian De Palma movie about the notorious Betty Short murder case, from 1947, which was the basis for a 1987 novel by James Ellroy, suffers from rampant allusiveness to other movies set in Los Angeles. The picture is a kind of fattened goose that's been stuffed with . . . goose-liver pâté. It's overrich and fundamentally unsatisfying. De Palma's screenwriter, Josh Friedman, shovels tons of undigested Ellroy onto the screen. The hero, an honest young cop named Dwight Bleichert (Josh Hartnett), toiling at the edges of a tangled mess of betrayal stretching back for decades, never quite understands what's going on, and often we don't either. The narrative is so awkwardly arranged that when the pieces of the puzzle finally fall into place, the effect is less dramatic than diagrammatic—character A slept with character B thirty years earlier, and, oh, yes, all of that connects to crimes X, Y, and Z. With Aaron Eckhart as Dwight's partner; Scarlett Johansson in a sweater, her hair up, as a lushly sensual baby Lana Turner; Hilary Swank, her mouth twisted with desire, as a lecherous, lying, raven-haired heiress; and Mia Kirshner as Betty Short herself—a slender, frightened girl glimpsed in some screen tests, a girl desperately eager to please.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/06.) (In wide release.)

THE CAMERAMAN
It's a romantic charmer—the exhilarating first product of Buster Keaton's ultimately calamitous turn from independent production to studio work at M-G-M. Keaton plays a lowly tintype photographer who transforms himself into a newsreel ace to win over the office girl at the studio's New York bureau. Keaton proves his genius at creating a parabola-like farce with what looks like a series of straight lines, whether he's racing across town to face his true love before she realizes that he's off the phone or getting his tripod levelled during a tong war by flying bullets. Under the direction of his old vaudeville buddy Edward M. Sedgwick, Jr., Keaton gets marvellous support from a cast that includes Marceline Day (the girl), Edward Brophy (a man in a cramped changing stall), and Josephine (an amazing performing monkey). Released in 1928. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Sept. 25.)

CRANK
A hyperactive Jason Statham continues his rise to stardom in this action drama, about a poisoned hit man racing around L.A. to find an antidote. The film, written and directed by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, careens around town as Statham's character tracks down the bad guys, rescues his girlfriend (Amy Smart), and chugs down all manner of energy supplements to keep his buzz alive (in the "Speed"-meets-"D.O.A." premise, he dies if his adrenaline level drops). The relentless editing and needless sadism substitute for any intriguing visceral jolts, but Statham delivers a lively performance; he easily outruns the film.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

FACTOTUM
A fine, unflustered attempt by the Norwegian director Bent Hamer—previously responsible for the trance-inducing "Kitchen Stories"—to make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visual sense of the world according to Charles Bukowski. The movie, scripted by Hamer and Jim Stark, is adapted from Bukowski's semiautobiographical "Factotum" and other writings, and it maintains his uneasy balance between fury and indolence; we can never be sure, from one scene to the next, whether Henry Chinaski (Matt Dillon) is going to lie around or lash out. The story is too steeped in alcohol to support a sober plot: Chinaski weaves from one job to the next, and from the ravenous Jan (Lili Taylor) to the more languorous Laura (Marisa Tomei), both as boozed up as himself. Without Dillon, the film would slip down too easily; he lends it both mellowness and bite, and the underwater slowness of his movements, like the deep murmur of his voice-overs, convincingly renders a soul who, while often laughable, refuses to be utterly lost.—*Anthony Lane* (8/28/06) (IFC Center.)

THE GROUND TRUTH

An upsetting but mesmerizing series of interviews with stunned veterans of the current Iraq war, many of them suffering from the "intrusive thoughts" characteristic of post-traumatic-stress disorder—in this case, the memory of civilian deaths caused by American fire. Putting it in an older language, they suffer from an inability to expiate crimes that they think they have committed. Yet, if expiation is impossible, penance is not: they can talk. This confessional movie is the vets' spiritual claim on sanity. Patricia Foulkrod, a veteran director and producer of documentaries, cuts the recollections and ruminations into fragments and then reassembles the fragments into chronological stages: recruitment, boot camp, combat, return, followed by the long, dismaying coda, in which the men and women struggle not to fall apart. As Foulkrod shifts from one vet to another, some of them maimed for life, there are moving bits of testimony, but we may balk at the abrupt editing, which leaves anecdotes and emotions hanging. We would like to see how these lives fit—or don't fit—together.—*D.D.* (Sunshine Cinema.)

"American Hardcore," a documentary by Paul Rachman about the aggressive rock music of the nineteen-eighties, opens Sept. 22.

JOHN RITTER

HALF NELSON

The young Canadian actor Ryan Gosling is quietly charismatic as Dan Dunne, a schoolteacher in a tough section of Brooklyn who knows how to teach history to his thirteen- and fourteen-year-old African-American students. Dunne is smart and dedicated, but he's also freebasing cocaine. When a girl in his class, Drey (Shareeka Epps), catches him in the act, a bond develops between them. The movie, made with a handheld camera by the team of Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden, is alert to the tensions in the two characters' lives and the raffish neighborhood milieu, but one comes away from it thinking that the filmmakers have coddled their hero. He is, after all, failing not only himself but the students who depend on him. The sources of Dunne's addiction are obscure, but "Half Nelson" nevertheless builds his problems into a parable of the misfortunes of liberalism.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HOLLYWOODLAND

Allen Coulter's mystery movie is itself hard to unpack: part period drama, part open-ended thriller, it pays uneasy homage to a bad dream of stardom. Ben Affleck plays George Reeves, the cheerful hulk of the nineteen-fifties who was unable to repeat on the big screen his popular triumph as Superman on the small one. Diane Lane turns in yet another fine performance, at once strong-minded and easily bruised, in the role of Reeves's older married lover. Reeves's death, in 1959, has long been one of the minor enigmas of Hollywood, and we duly follow a fictional detective (Adrien Brody) as he tries, and fails, to deliver a clear solution. The problem is not just that Brody seems too reedy and gentle for a private eye but that the aftermath of Reeves's career is no match for the brief and glamorous flare of the living man. In the end, the movie belongs to Lane, for her portrait of a beautiful woman mounting a wry, doomed defense against the abrasions of time. With Bob Hoskins as her husband, a doting, cuckolded thug.—*A.L.* (9/11/06) (In wide release.)

THE ILLUSIONIST

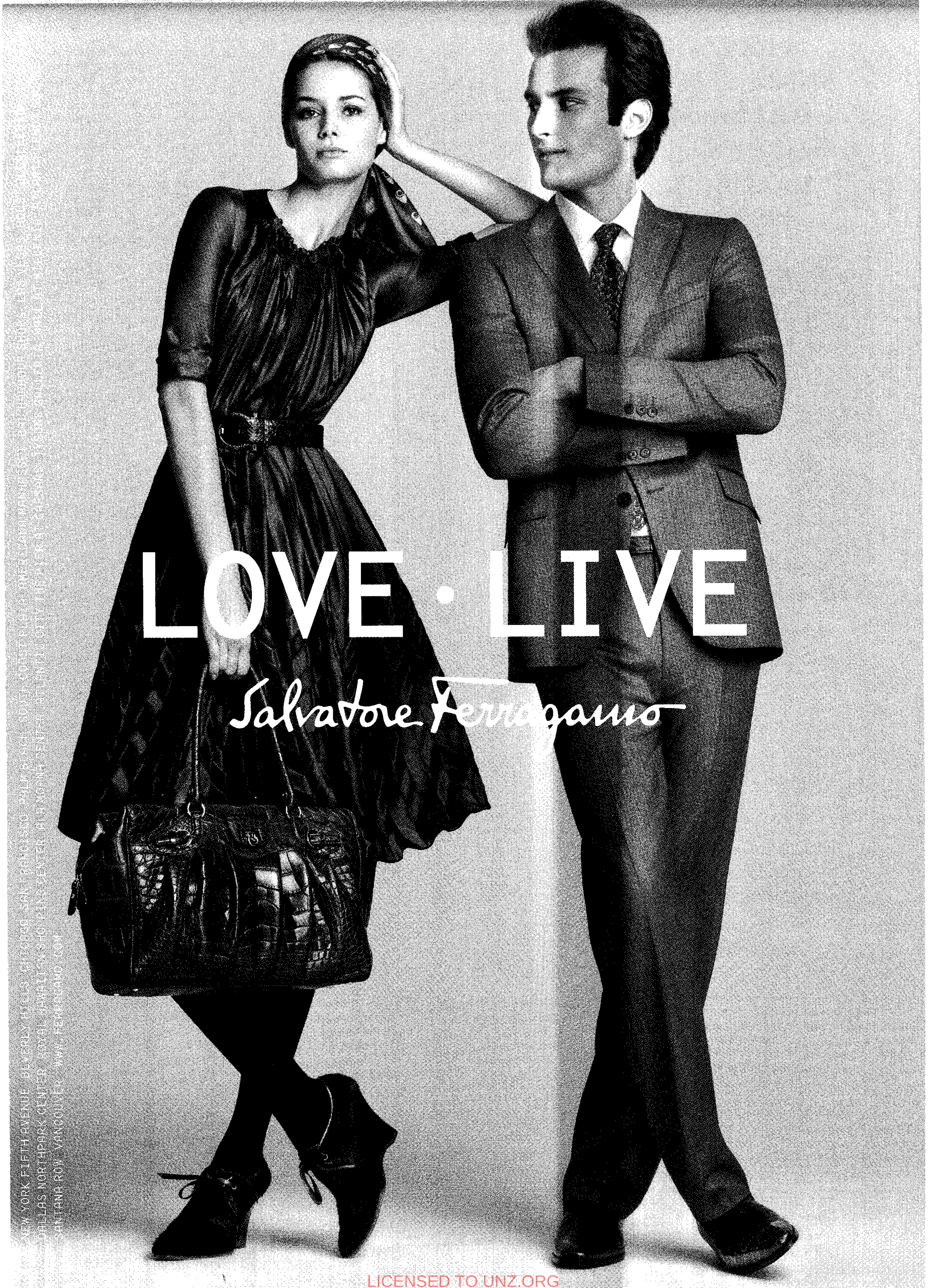
Edward Norton as a master magician of plebeian origin in late-nineteenth-century imperial Austria, Jessica Biel as the young duchess he's in love with, Rufus Sewell as the smart but sadistic crown prince who wants to marry the duchess and take over the empire, and Paul Giamatti as the police inspector who is loyal to the prince but fascinated by the magician. Unconvincing controversy over whether the magician's playing with the relation of reality to illusion constitutes a political threat to the empire or just a threat to the prince's romantic ambitions; intelligent, beautifully photographed production in rather dry, very delicate color (Dick Pope is the cinematographer), but, all in all, a great deal of craftsmanship wasted over nothing. Directed by Neil Burger; based (sort of) on a story by Steven Millhauser. Shot in the Czech Republic.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

JESUS CAMP

Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady document a growing denomination of Evangelical Christians in the Midwest, focussing on a Pentecostal children's-camp pastor, Becky Fischer, and three young campers. The filmmakers insinuate that the religious right, a powerful voting bloc in the U.S., is training a generation of children ("God's army") to carry on their message. In brief scenes of the children's home lives, their parents teach creationism as fact and deny the existence of global warming. The compassionate portraits resonate with empathy, particularly those of Rachael, nine, a sweet, nervous ball of energy who revels in the thought of being considered a martyr, and Levi, twelve, a bright, idealistic young man eager to preach the gospel. Ewing and Grady present the Methodist radio host Mike Papantonio, a staunch defender of the separation of church and state, as a voice of opposition to Pastor Becky's Evangelical beliefs, but the recalcitrant nature of her doctrine remains impenetrable.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

LAW OF DESIRE

This flamboyantly glamorous homosexual fantasy by Madrid's gagster-artist Pedro Almodóvar is satirical, romantic, metaphorical; it has wonderful jokes and the exaggerated plot of an absurdist Hollywood melodrama. It doesn't disguise its narcissism; it turns it into bright-colored tragicomedy. And even when it loses its beat (after a murder) there's always something happening. Carmen Maura, a powerful actress in the manner of the early Anna Magnani, with the trippiness and self-mockery of Bette Midler, plays Tina, a transsexual who has a hot, roiling temperament. Tina's celebrity brother, Pablo (Eusebio Poncela), directs classy homoerotic films. One night, Pablo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takes home Antonio (Antonio Banderas), a government minister's son, who has been stalking him; by morning, Antonio loves him, is determined to possess him completely, and refuses to get out of his life. This is one of the rare movies that's sensually exciting at the same time that it's funny. With Miguel Molina as Pablo's true love, Manuela Velasco as little Ada, and the male transvestite Bibí Andersen as Tina's lesbian ex-lover. Cinematography by Ángel Luis Fernández. Released in 1987. In Spanish.—*Pauline Kael* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas; Sept. 22-26.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance. With Alan Arkin and Toni Collette as the family's realists.—*D.D.* (7/31/06) (In wide release.)

MUTUAL APPRECIATION

Andrew Bujalski's self-absorbed, meandering, intensely sincere film exemplifies—and risks parodying—independent filmmaking, and yet these limitations become strengths in the writer-director's personal, unstinting view of a classic problem—the shifting affections when a couple and a single guy are the best of friends. A trio of recent college graduates are scraping by in Williamsburg: Alan (Justin Rice), who has just come to New York to form an indie-rock band; his best friend, Lawrence (Bujalski), a low-intensity graduate student; and Lawrence's girlfriend, Ellie (Rachel Clift), an editorial assistant who becomes Alan's manager and conflicted admirer. Bujalski has a logical eye for parsing casually unfolding events with visual coherence, and his dryly satirical view of grownups' inevitable fatuities doesn't lose sight of the charming vanity of youthful illusions. As the artist, Alan is the film's moral center: practicing his guitar in his grungy Williamsburg room or soldiering along at his band's sparsely attended gig, he exudes the kind of dreamy faith and unrealistic determination that this film embodies, and that got it made.—*Richard Brody* (Cinema Village.)

RIDING ALONE FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES

The director Zhang Yimou returns to the allegorical drama in this simple but at times trenchantly emotional tale of Takada (the excellent Ken Takakura), a widowed Japanese fisherman. In order to win the respect of his estranged son, who is gravely ill, Takada journeys to Yunnan, China, where, unable to speak the language, he attempts to film a production of a Chinese folk opera that was his son's passion. It turns out that the actor he hopes to film is in jail, and a series of events leads him to the actor's bastard son in a remote village. Despite the sentimental context, Zhang calmly insinuates a soft condemnation of authoritarian usurpation of the individual's right to make choices. Although Zhang cloyingly overexplains, in a voice-over, circumstances that unfold clearly enough onscreen, what is there is quite beautiful. The cinematography of uninhabited mountain vistas is stunning, the supporting characters are charming, and Takakura stoically portrays the pained patience with which Takada undertakes his stubborn quest. In Mandarin and Japanese.—*S.L.* (Quad Cinema.)

SHERRYBABY

Maggie Gyllenhaal gives an intelligent, brave performance in Laurie Collyer's film, which is based on the true story of Sherry Swanson, a recovering heroin addict. Just out of prison, Sherry returns to

CLASSICAL NOTES
AFTER THE DELUGE

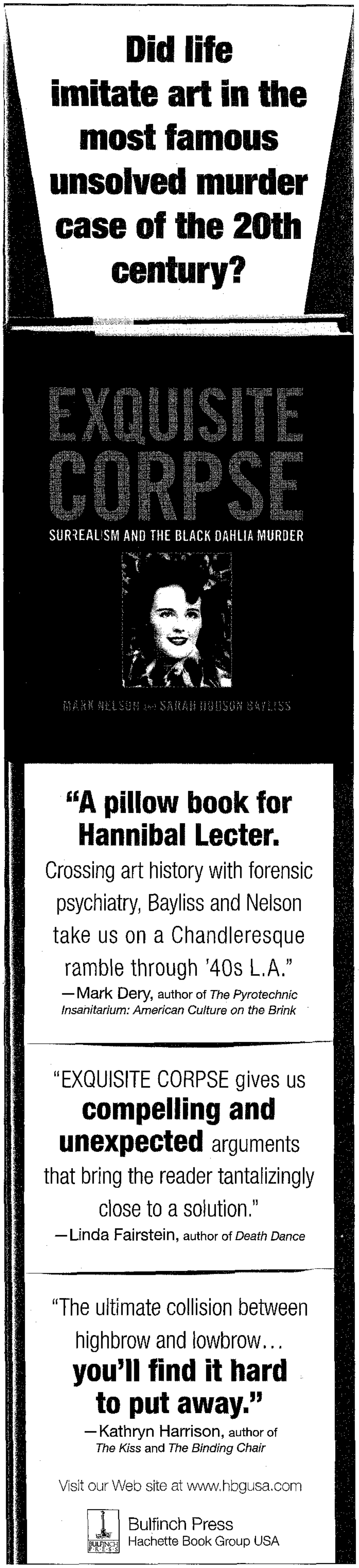
As the First World War raged around him, the Viennese composer Franz Schreker was writing an opera that would use a lush and decadent setting as a platform for a pitiless examination of personal morality. **"Die Gezeichneten"** ("The Branded") thrived in European opera houses during the twenties, only to be suppressed by the Nazis because Schreker was Jewish. The long-delayed Schreker revival, which began in the late nineteen-seventies, reached a climax last summer with a production at the Salzburg Festival, which is now available on DVD from EuroArts, confirming Schreker's turbulent genius.

Set in Renaissance Genoa, the plot concerns the attempt by Alviano Salvago, a hunchbacked nobleman, to give Elysium, his island pleasure palace, to the city, a move opposed by a group of aristocrats who surreptitiously use the island's grotto for orgies with kidnapped young women. Nikolaus Lehnhoff's forceful, if extreme, staging updates the scenario to suit present gender obsessions: Salvago (Robert Brubaker, in an eloquent, if unsubtle, performance) loses his hump but likes to cross-dress, and the unfortunate girls are literally children, of both sexes.

The piece lacks the optimistic tunefulness of Strauss's contemporaneous "Ariadne auf Naxos," but it has enormous strengths. No composer since Mozart moves his action along with such assurance, and the orchestration has a bewitching and seductive complexity. The production is crowned by a magnificent performance from the soprano Anne Schwanewilms as Salvago's doomed bride; Kent Nagano and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin provide fine support in the pit.

In Louis Andriessen's recent **"Writing to Vermeer,"** the personal and political are kept separate. In 1672, Vermeer's wife (the soprano Susan Narucki), his mother-in-law, and his favorite model sit at desks writing fictional letters to the artist while a chorus of young women brings to life the quotidian activities of his household. The opera ends not with Vermeer's eagerly awaited return but with the flooding of the stage. The libretto is by Peter Greenaway, whose penchant for violence is fulfilled in brief electronic interludes (by the composer Michel van der Aa) evoking other events in Holland's "year of disasters"; these form islands in the flow of Andriessen's post-minimalist music, which is lulling and disturbing by turns. The CD format of this Nonesuch release makes it hard to gauge the opera's ultimate effect, but the performance, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw, is incisive, sensual, and alert.

—*Russell Platt*



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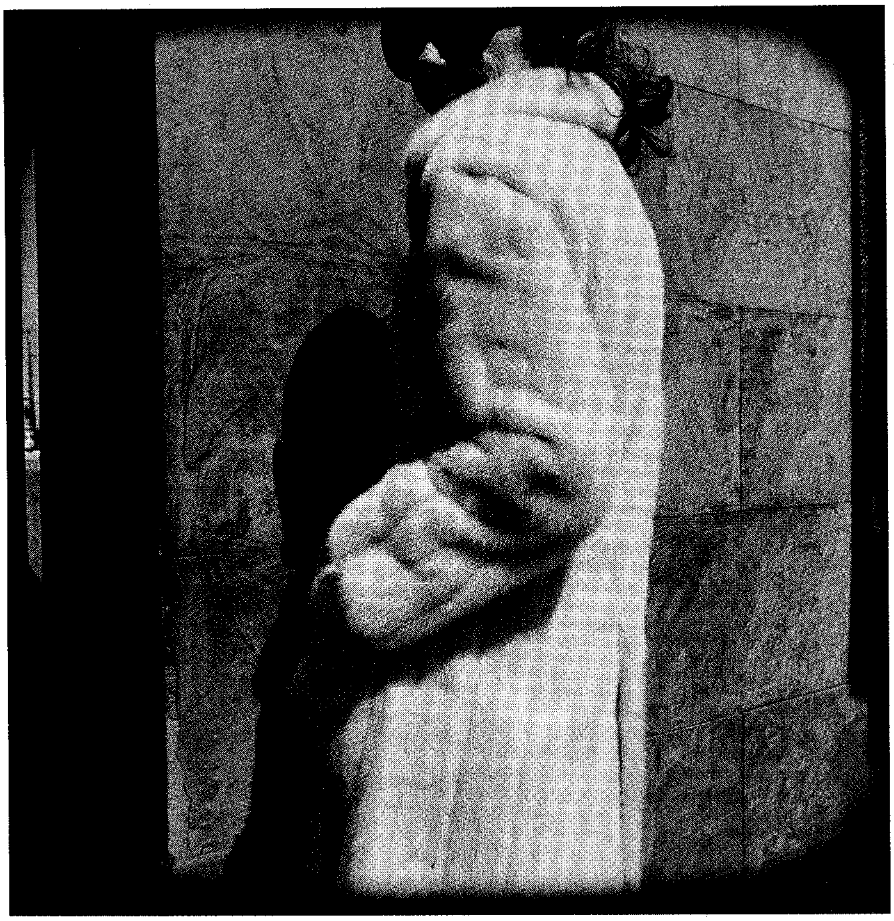

Charles H. Traub's "Chicago, 1975," from a show opening this week at Gitterman.

her home town, in New Jersey, where she finds her five-year-old daughter, Alexis, living comfortably with her brother and sister-in-law. Gyllenhaal nails the anger, the neediness, and the mercurial mood swings of an addict, proficiently rising above the otherwise bland filmmaking in this Sundance-endorsed indie. There are smart moments, such as a sex scene immediately upon Sherry's arrival at a halfway house, and telling interactions with her bemused but adaptable daughter. But the relentlessness of the cycle of abuse and the suggestion that every male in her orbit is after only one thing become wearying, and lack the ring of truth that Gyllenhaal so meticulously achieves with her persuasive performance.—*S.L.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Kenji Mizoguchi's grand, ambitious melodrama, from 1939, has the timeless poignancy of legend. A mediocre actor, Kikunosuke (Shotaro Hanayagi), endures the public's disdain for his performances in plays put on by his father (Gonjuro Kawarazaki), a great actor. Toku (Kakuko Mori), a servant girl, loves Kikunosuke and believes in his talent, but his father disapproves of their relationship. Leaving home to strike out on his own—and to live with Toku—Kikunosuke faces the world unprotected by his family ties. Still without fame, he now must also do without money; his last chance for redemption threatens to be Toku's undoing. This intimate story, set in the late-nineteenth-century world of the Kabuki theatre, is built on an epic framework: as in the greatest of tragedies, Mizoguchi holds his characters' personal struggles and the abusive demands of their society in a tense equilibrium. Filming with a contemplative, dramatically exacting technique of long tracking shots that set the text as perfectly as a musical score, Mizoguchi sustains a faith in art even as he tallies its unbearable real-life price. In Japanese.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Sept. 20.)

THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED

Kirby Dick's new documentary takes on the Motion Picture Association of America, and, in particular, the power of its ratings board to tell us which words, activities, and body parts we should or should not, as moviegoers, be allowed to consume. This is a tempting subject, and the punches launched by Dick and some of his contributors, including John Waters, Kimberly Peirce, and Kevin Smith, hit home. At times, however, the movie starts to flail; brief glances at the Hollywood blacklist and the photographic evidence from Abu Ghraib tend to confuse rather than propel the argument. The neatest gambit is Dick's hiring of a private investigator to trace and name the members of both the ratings board and the appeals tribunal, all of whom have until now retained their anonymity. Much of the film may be a wasted opportunity, but few will question Dick's demand for transparency from those who sit and frown in judgment on what we watch.—*A.L.* (8/28/06) (IFC Center.)

THE U.S. VS. JOHN LENNON

Like much of America during the Vietnam War, the real-life ballad of John and Yoko had a sharp political edge, which is brought to light in this absorbing documentary by David Leaf and John Scheinfeld. Lennon put his art and fame in the service of protest, as with the couple's honeymoon "bed-ins" for peace, in 1969. When they moved to New York in 1971, they were subjected to relentless federal surveillance, in part because of their endorsement of the Black Panther Party. When Lennon planned to join Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin in free open-air concerts outside the 1972 Republican Convention, in Miami, he was promptly subjected to deportation proceedings. With interviews from a wide range of sources (many revealing, some bloviating, and one chilling—G. Gordon Liddy, from the parallel universe of the Nixon Administration) and astonishing archival footage, the filmmakers vividly conjure the intensity of the social conflict that roiled Amer-

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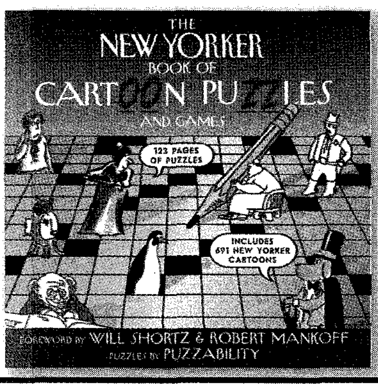
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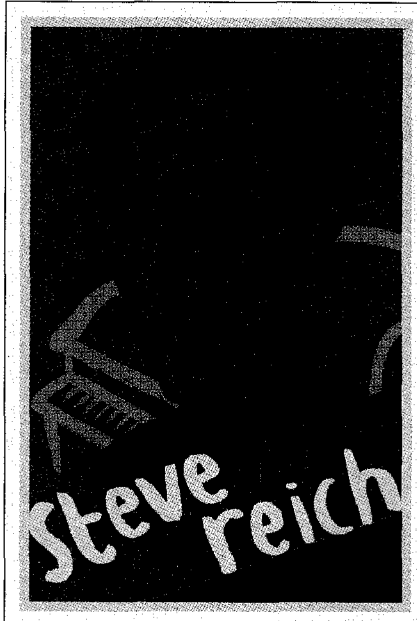

CLASSICAL PREVIEW

In the aftermath of 9/11, New York's classical-music groups were simply trying to keep themselves afloat. But, five years on, there are ambitious plans for change.

MEET THE NEW BOSS

At the Metropolitan Opera, the regime of the new general manager, Peter Gelb, is finally in place. His taste in directors is bold. A new production of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" (beginning Nov. 10), with Diana Damrau and Juan Diego Flórez, will be staged by Bartlett Sher (of "The Light in the Piazza" fame), and the world-première production (Dec. 21) of Tan Dun's "The First Emperor" will be directed by the Chinese auteur Zhang Yimou; Plácido Domingo sings the title role. Innovation takes a subtler form at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where the new artistic directors, David Finckel and Wu Han, have deftly woven scores by Kirchner, Stucky, and Saariaho into the usual pattern of works by Brahms, Schumann, and Debussy.

MUSEUM PIECES

A big addition to the concert scene is the Morgan Library's diminutive new concert hall, which will present two mini-series by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and the Boston Early Music Festival. The Metropolitan Museum is mounting its most interesting lineup in years, with old favorites like the Beaux Arts Trio joined on the schedule by the eccentric pianist Ivo Pogorelich (Oct. 26) and by an all-star string-quartet concert in which the violinist Geoff Nuttall, the violist Nicholas Mann, and the cellist Bonnie Hampton will be fronted by the veteran violinist Robert Mann, the founder of the Juilliard String Quartet (Dec. 9).

CARNEGIE COOL

Carnegie Hall's newest performance space, Zankel Hall, has retained a cool, curatorial feel: a Steve Reich program (Oct. 22), which includes such works as "Drumming" and the U.S. première of "Daniel Variations" (a memorial to the reporter Daniel Pearl), will be a major stop on the round of fall concerts celebrating his seventieth birthday. (Others will take place at Lincoln Center and BAM.) Tradition is hallowed at Stern Auditorium. After an opening trio of concerts by the Cleveland Orchestra (beginning Oct. 4), the schedule features appearances by such soloists as Leon Fleisher (Oct. 19) and Anne-Sophie Mutter (performing in three concerts of Mozart violin sonatas, on Nov. 15, Nov. 17, and Nov. 19).

ica during the war years (as well as the extravagant media stunts in which it played out). Though they whitewash the violence of the Panthers and yet go to great lengths to dissociate Lennon and Ono from it, their calmly outraged view of government violence, whether abroad or at home, is cogent and timely.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

VAN GOGH
Maurice Pialat's intense, bleak re-creation of the painter's last days begins with his arrival in Auvers, in the North of France, to consult Dr. Gachet. Troubled by fits, fresh from an asylum stay, recently recovered from his self-mutilation at Arles, van Gogh returns to work invigorated by his friendship with the connoisseur and entranced by his daughter, Marguerite (Alexandra London), a sharp-tongued free spirit whose devotion to the erratic artist tests her bourgeois father's liberal principles. As embodied by the rock singer-turned-actor Jacques Dutronc, van Gogh is subtle, good-humored, ironic, bristling with attitude, and burdened with mental crises. He depends on his brother Theo, an art dealer who doesn't believe in his art; and he cannot control his hunger for sex, drink, and excitement, despite their apparent threat to his fragile constitution. Pialat fills the film with iconic Impressionist amusements (dances at riverside cafés, girls at the piano, rowers in straw hats) as well as with the painter's rugged pleasures, including a Montmartre dance hall, where his tragic outburst of wild drunken joy plays like the celestial flare of a dying star. Released in 1991. In French.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 22-23.)

WORLD TRADE CENTER
Rushing downtown on the morning of September 11, 2001, a group of Port Authority cops, including Sergeant John McLoughlin (Nicolas Cage) and the rookie Will Jimeno (Michael Peña), encounter a hallucinatory storm of paper drifting down from the Twin Towers. Later, trapped in the rubble of the collapsing buildings, McLoughlin and Jimeno provide each other with whatever support and consolation they are capable of, while, at home, their families respond to the catastrophe and their uncertainty about the men with convincing degrees of fear, bravado, panic, and rage. Oliver Stone's aesthetically conservative 9/11 movie is a work of considerable power that captures the oppressive physical strangeness and exhausting emotional demands of that day.—*D.D.* (8/21/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE COVENANT: In wide release. **EVERYONE'S HERO:** In wide release. **GRIDIRON GANG:** In wide release. **THE LAST KISS:** In wide release. **THE WICKER MAN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New-Filmmakers Presents." Sept. 20 at 6: "Beyond 88 Keys: The Music of Michael Arnowitt" (2004, Susan Betteman). ♦ The films of Philip Hoffman. Sept. 20 at 8: Short films, including "Passing Through/Torn Formation" (1988). ♦ Sept. 21 at 9: "What These Ashes Wanted" (2001) and "?O, Zoo!" (1986). ♦ Films about Vincent Van Gogh. Sept. 21 at 7 and Sept. 23 at 6: "Lust for Life" (1956, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ Sept. 21 at 9:30 and Sept. 24 at 8:30: "Vincent & Theo" (1990, Robert Altman). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7 and Sept. 24 at 6: "Vincent: The Life and Death of Vincent Van Gogh" (1987, Paul Cox). ♦ Sept. 22 at 9:15 and Sept. 23 at 8:30: "Van Gogh" (†). ♦ In première. Sept. 22 and Sept. 25-26 at 7:30 and Sept. 23-24 at 5:30 and 7:30: "The Decay of Fiction" (2002, Pat O'Neill).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinema Tropical." Sept. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15:

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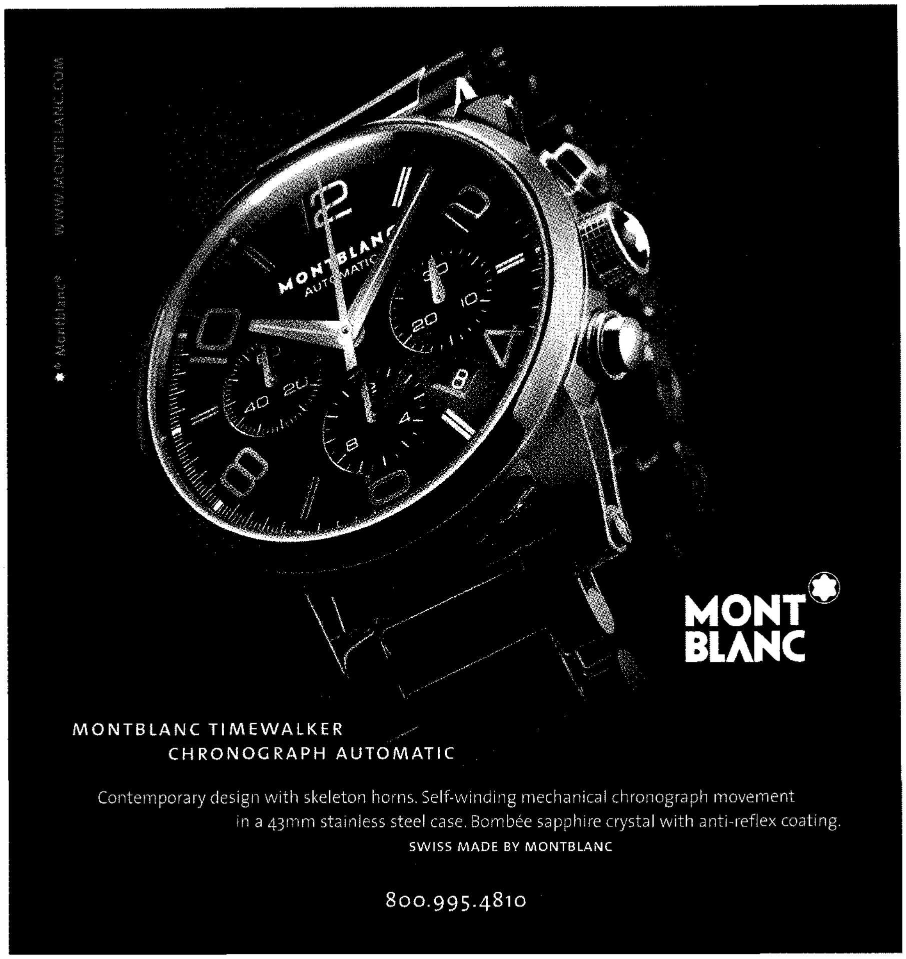

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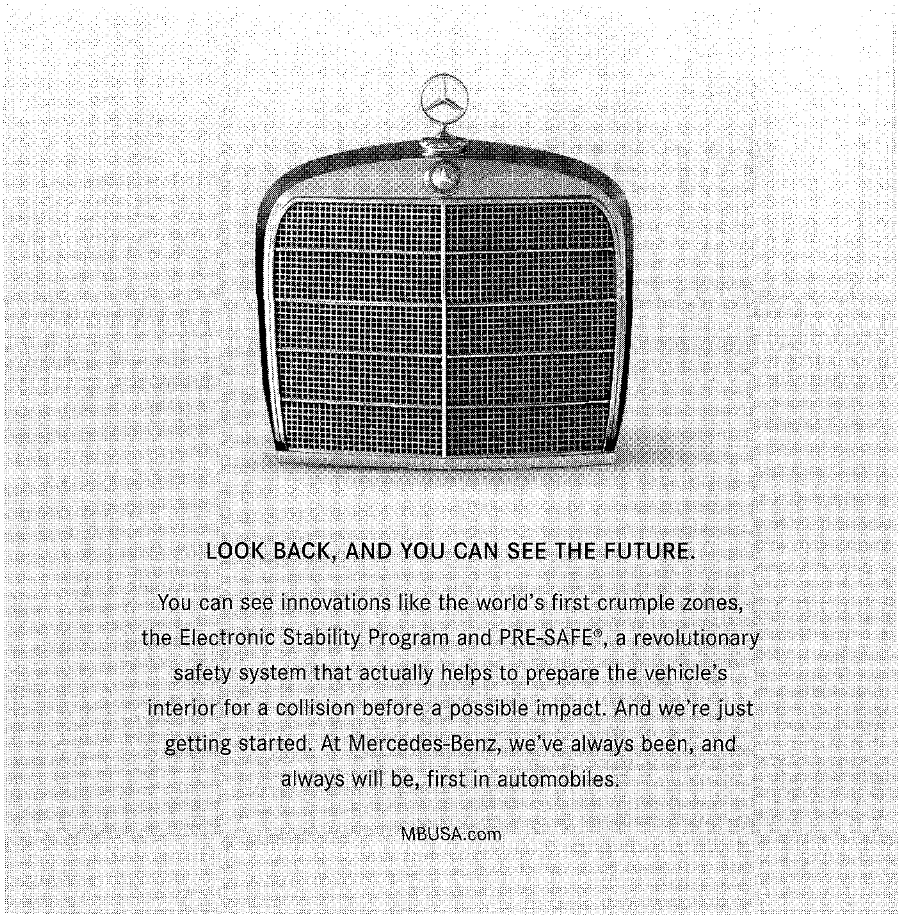

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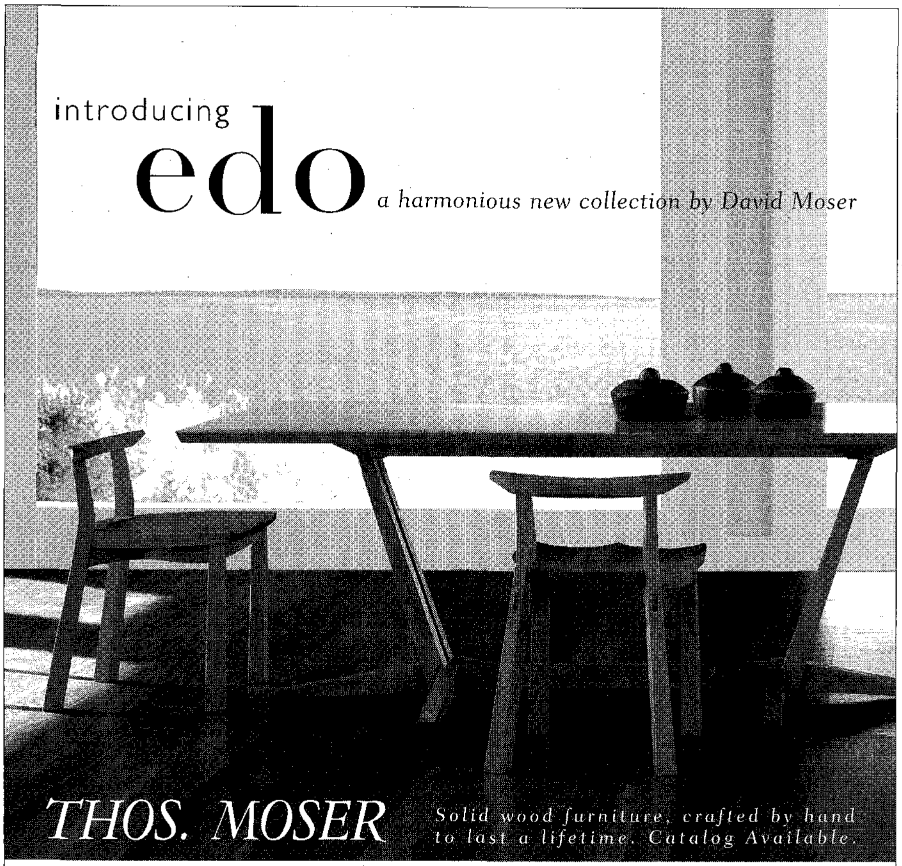

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"The Supreme Uneasiness: Incessant Portrait of Fernando Vallejo" (2003, Luis Ospina; in Spanish). ♦ The films of Jean-Claude Carrière. Sept. 21 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Max Mon Amour" (1986, Nagisa Oshima; in French and English). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7: "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" (1987, Philip Kaufman). ♦ Sept. 23 at 3, 6, and 9: "Danton" (1983, Andrzej Wajda; in French). ♦ Sept. 24 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Every Man for Himself" (1980, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ The films of Lech Kowalski. Sept. 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "D.O.A." (1980). ♦ Sept. 26 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "East of Paradise" (2005).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The films of Kenji Mizoguchi. All films are in Japanese. Sept. 20 at 1, 3:40, 6:20, and 9: "The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums" (†). ♦ Sept. 21 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "Sisters of the Gion" (1936). ♦ Sept. 21 at 2:30, 5:50, and 9:10: "Street of Shame" (1956). ♦ In revival. Sept. 20-26 at 1, 3:45, 6:45, and 9:30: "Army of Shadows" (1969, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French). ♦ Through Oct. 5: "Pythonalot" Sept. 22-24 and Sept. 26 at 1:30, 3:20, 5:10, 7, and 9: "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (1975, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones). ♦ The films of Buster Keaton. All films are silent. Sept. 25 at 2:05, 5:20, and 8:30: "Spite Marriage" (1929). ♦ Sept. 25 at 3:45, 7, and 10:10: "The Cameraman" (†).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"European Dream Festival: The Youth of Europe." Sept. 20 at 7: "Games of Love and Chance" (2004, Abdellatif Kechiche; in French), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Sept. 20 at 9:30: "On the Sunny Side" (2003, Miha Hocevar; in Slovenian). ♦ Sept. 21 at 4:30: "Héctor" (2004, Gracia Querejeta; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 21 at 7: "Ginger and Cinnamon" (2003, Daniele Luchetti; in Italian and English), introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 21 at 9:30: "Something Like Happiness" (2005, Bohdan Sláma; in Czech). ♦ Sept. 22 at 2: "Leila and Lena" (2005, Michael Pfeifenberger; in Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian). ♦ Sept. 22 at 4:30: "Frozen Land" (2005, Aku Louhimies; in Finnish). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7: "Jeune Homme" (2006, Christoph Schaud; in French), introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 22 at 9:30: "Ghosts" (2005, Christian Petzold; in German). ♦ Sept. 23 at 2:30: "Revolution of Pigs" (2004, Jaak Kilmi and Rene Reinumägi; in Estonian). ♦ Sept. 23 at 4:30: "14 Sucks" (2005, Filippa Freijd, Martin Jern, Emil Larsson, and Henrik Norrthon; in Swedish). ♦ Sept. 23 at 7: "Diep" (2005, Simone Van Dusseldorp; in Dutch). ♦ Sept. 23 at 9:30: "Occident" (2002, Cristian Mungiu; in Romanian). ♦ French comedies. Sept. 26 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "La Chèvre" (1981, Francis Veber; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Sept. 20-26 (call for showtimes): "Sólo con Tu Pareja" (1991, Alfonso Cuarón; in Spanish). ♦ In première. Sept. 21 at 8: "Four Eyed Monsters" (2006, Arin Crumley and Susan Buice). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 22-23: "Y Tu Mamá También" (2001, Cuarón; in Spanish). ♦ The New York International Children's Film Festival. Sept. 23-24 at 11 A.M.: "Oliver!" (1966, Carol Reed). ♦ "Ecotopia." Sept. 25 at 7: "Lessons of Darkness" (1992, Werner Herzog) and "Radiophobia" (2006, Julio Soto Gurpide).

LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS

Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280)—The films of Pedro Almodóvar. Call for showtimes. Sept. 20-21: "Live Flesh" (1997; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 22-26: "Law of Desire" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Huston Family: 75 Years on Film." Sept. 20 at 6: "Moulin Rouge" (1952, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 20 at 6: "Buffalo '66" (1998, Vincent Gallo). ♦ Sept. 20 at 8:30: "The Proposition" (2005, John Hillcoat), introduced by Danny Huston. ♦ Sept. 21 at 6: "The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean" (1972, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 21 at 8:30: "Fade to Black" (2006, Oliver Parker), introduced by Danny Huston. ♦ Sept. 22 at 4:30: "The Devil and Daniel Webster" (1941, William Dieterle). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7: "Mr. Corbett's Ghost" (1987, Danny Huston). ♦ Sept. 22 at 8:30:

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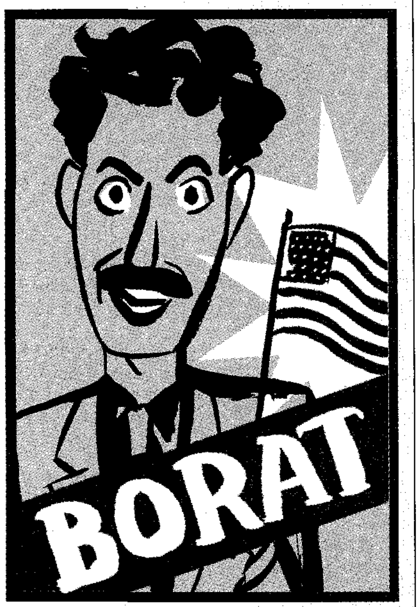

MOVIES PREVIEW

Many of the heavyweight films due to come trundling in this season are period pieces, covering a broad historical spectrum.

HISTORY LESSONS
Steven Zaillian's long-awaited remake of "All the King's Men" (Sept. 22), based on Robert Penn Warren's novel, stars Sean Penn as Willie Stark, a demagogic Louisiana politician; Jude Law, Kate Winslet, and Mark Ruffalo co-star. "Flags of Our Fathers" (Oct. 20), Clint Eastwood's version of the American victory on the tiny island of Iwo Jima, stars Ryan Phillippe, Joseph Cross, and Jesse Bradford. It will be followed later in the year by his "Letters from Iwo Jima," which examines the same battle from the Japanese perspective. And Steven Soderbergh's "The Good German" (Dec. 8), a black-and-white panorama of postwar Germany, stars George Clooney as a journalist covering the Potsdam Conference, Cate Blanchett as his ex, and Tobey Maguire as an American soldier and black-market dealer.

IMMORTAL LONGINGS
Larger-than-life actors leap into the garb of outsized characters, as Helen Mirren stars as Queen Elizabeth II and Michael Sheen plays Tony Blair in "The Queen" (Sept. 30), Stephen Frears's docudrama about the British government's response to Princess Diana's death. In "Copying Beethoven" (Oct. 13), Ed Harris stars as the composer; in "Marie Antoinette" (Oct. 20), Sofia Coppola uses rock music and modern fashion to recount the last years of the ancien régime; starring Kirsten Dunst as the Queen and Jason Schwartzman as Louis XVI.

AROUND THE WORLD
Sacha Baron Cohen stars as "Borat" (Nov. 3), a TV host from Kazakhstan who reports from the U.S.; co-starring Pamela Anderson. Pedro Almodóvar's latest, "Volver" (Nov. 3), stars Penélope Cruz and Carmen Maura in a whimsical drama about three generations of women and the dark secrets that hold them together. "Casino Royale" (Nov. 17) stars Daniel Craig as James Bond, directed by Martin Campbell; co-starring Eva Green and Dame Judi Dench. And back home the primordial indie turned insider, Martin Scorsese, returns with "The Departed" (Oct. 6), a crime drama set in Boston, about the Irish Mafia; Jack Nicholson, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Matt Damon star.

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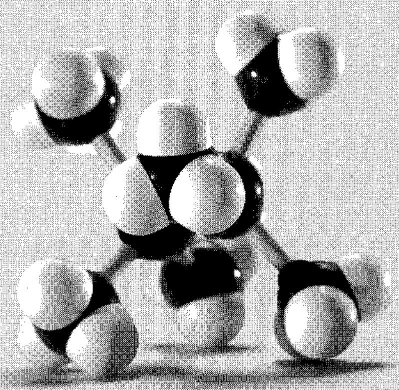

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"Reflections in a Golden Eye" (1967, John Huston). ♦ The films of Pola Negri. All films are silent, except where noted. Sept. 20 at 8:15 and Sept. 22 at 8: "Die Bergkatze" (1921, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ Sept. 21 at 6 and Sept. 25 at 8: "A Woman of the World" (1925, Mal St. Clair) and short films. ♦ Sept. 21 at 8 and Sept. 25 at 6: "Hotel Imperial" (1927, Mauritz Stiller). ♦ Sept. 22: "Madame DuBarry" (1919, Lubitsch) and an excerpt from "Carmen" (1918, Lubitsch; silent). ♦ Sept. 24 at 1:30: "Life Is a Dream in Cinema: Pola Negri" (2006, Mariusz Kotowski). ♦ "Out of Time," films about contemporary art. Sept. 23 at 2: "Empire" (1964, Andy Warhol). ♦ "Made in NY." Sept. 23 at 2: "Hannah and Her Sisters" (1986, Woody Allen). ♦ Sept. 23 at 4:30 and Sept. 25 at 6: "Tootsie" (1982, Sydney Pollack). ♦ Sept. 23 at 7: "Requiem for a Dream" (2000, Darren Aronofsky). ♦ Sept. 24 at 2:30: "Do the Right Thing" (1989, Spike Lee). ♦ Sept. 24 at 5: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Sept. 25 at 8:30: "The Godfather" (1972, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ "Asian Cinevisions." Sept. 24 at 3:30: "Who's Camus Anyway?" (2005, Mitsuo Yanagimachi; in Japanese).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Oct. 8: The films of Josef von Sternberg. Sept. 22 at 7:30 and Sept. 23-24 at 6: "The Saga of Anatahan" (1954; in English and Japanese). ♦ Sept. 23 at 2: "Morocco" (1930). ♦ Sept. 23 at 4: "Dishonored" (1931). ♦ Sept. 24 at 2: "An American Tragedy" (1931).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In revival. Sept. 20 at 7: "Human Desire" (1954, Fritz Lang). ♦ Sept. 23 at 11: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper). ♦ Sept. 25 at 7: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ In première. Sept. 20-26 at 9: "Home" (2006, Jeffrey Togman). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7: "Tomorrow Always Comes" (2006, Jacob Burckhardt and Royston Scott). ♦ Sept. 23-24 at 6: "The Sorceress of the New Piano: The Artistry of Margaret Leng Tan" (2005, Evans Chan), with a musical performance by Tan.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Sept. 22-23: "Feast" (2005, John Gulager).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"The Supporting Cast: As Bright As the Stars." Sept. 24 and Sept. 26 at 5:15: "Laura" (1944, Otto Preminger). ♦ Sept. 24 and Sept. 26 at 7: "Key Largo" (1948, John Huston).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Latin Beat." Except where noted, all films are in Spanish. Sept. 20 at 2 and Sept. 24 at 6: "For Rent" (2005, Alberto Fuguet). ♦ Sept. 20 at 8:45: "The Girl on the Stone" (2005, Maryse Sistach). ♦ Sept. 21 at 2 and 8:15 and Sept. 22 at 4: "Through Your Eyes" (2006, Rodrigo Furth). ♦ Sept. 21 at 4:30 and Sept. 22 at 6:15: "Revolution: Five Visions" (2006, Nicole Cattell). ♦ Sept. 21 at 6:30, Sept. 22 at 2:15, and Sept. 24 at 8:30: "Other (Sweet) Barbarians" (2002, Andrucha Waddington; in Portuguese). ♦ Sept. 22 at 8 and Sept. 24 at 3:30: "The Sweet Barbarians" (1977, Jom Tob Azulay; in Portuguese). ♦ Sept. 23 at 4 and Sept. 24 at 1: "Brazil: The Tropicálist Revolution" (2001, Yves Billon and Dominique Dreyfus; in English and Portuguese) and "Caetano Veloso 50 Years" (1993, Walter Salles and José Henrique Fonseca; in Portuguese). ♦ Special screening. Sept. 25 at 7: "Boys Don't Cry" (1999, Kimberly Peirce), presented by the producer Christine Vachon.

READINGS AND TALKS

JOHN POMFRET
Pomfret, one of the first Americans to enter China as an exchange student, some twenty years ago, reads from his new book, "Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China." (192 Books, Tenth Ave. between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. Sept. 20 at 7.)

FRANCINE PROSE
The novelist discusses her latest book, "Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them." (McNally Robinson Booksellers, 50 Prince St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 20 at 7.)

STANLEY KUNITZ MEMORIAL
Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Galway Kinnell, Gretchen Kunitz, and others honor the late poet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Sept. 20 at 8.)

"FANTASTIC FICTION"
The monthly science-fiction reading series at KGB bar presents Delia Sherman and Ellen Kushner. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 20 at 7.)

JAMES MCGREEVEY
The former governor of New Jersey talks about his new memoir, "The Confession." (Barnes & Noble, Sixth Ave. at 22nd St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 22 at 7.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"A REFUGEE CAMP IN THE HEART OF THE CITY"
Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières is sponsoring an interactive exhibition to call attention to the estimated thirty-three million people worldwide who have lost their homes because of war or natural disasters. Using the same materials employed in places like Chad, Chechnya, Lebanon, and Sudan, the aid group has set up tents where visitors can taste the high-protein biscuits given to refugees and learn about how medical care is administered under adverse conditions. Photographs from afflicted regions by the likes of Jean-Marc Giboux, Tyler Hicks, and Sebastião Salgado will also be exhibited. (Prospect Park, Brooklyn. Sept. 20-24. For more information, call 800-490-0773, or visit www.doctorswithoutborders.org.)

METROPOLITAN OPERA OPEN HOUSE
It is a season of innovation for the venerable opera company, which recently began advertising on billboards throughout the city and which plans, starting in December, to beam live performances into movie theatres around the country. This week, the Met holds its first-ever daylong look behind the scenes. The event includes an opportunity to see the final dress rehearsal of the season opener, "Madama Butterfly," on the house. (For information about the free tickets, which are required, call 212-799-3100. Sept. 22, starting at 9 A.M.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
At **Sotheby's**, a sale of contemporary Asian art (Sept. 20) underscores the great dynamism of the Chinese art scene; the top lot, "Street Theater," is a compelling diptych by Chen Danqing made up of two large, painstakingly rendered reproductions of documentary photographs, one of a man sitting in Tiananmen Square after the 1989 massacre, the other of a girl humiliated by the crowd in post-Liberation Chartres, her hair shorn. A sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art spanning five thousand years follows (Sept. 21); opera lovers will be drawn to a seventeenth-century Namban-style painted lacquer screen that once belonged to the soprano Anna Moffo, who died earlier this year. The house's first sale of contemporary Indian art will be held on Sept. 22. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The second day of **Christie's** Asian Week picks up where Sotheby's left off, with a sale of modern and contemporary art from India (Sept. 20), followed later the same day by an auction of Indian and Southeast Asian art that includes everything from Indian bronze and stone sculptures to Tibetan ritual objects, such as a fifteenth-century black stone stela representing the wisdom deity Yama Dharmaraja. On Sept. 21, a monumental thirteenth-century Kei-school "guardian" (which once stood at the entrance to a Buddhist temple) scowls over the proceedings at an auction of Japanese and Korean art. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Doyle** gets in on the action with a far-ranging Asian sale of its own (Sept. 26), which includes everything from pottery, jade, and bronzes to screens and furniture. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

Fanciers'
cat show

ABOVE & BEYOND PREVIEW

Authors, cat owners, and Trekkies all have their moment this fall.

"SELECTED SHORTS"
Symphony Space's reading series starts its twenty-fourth season on Sept. 27 with "Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience." Stephen Lang and others will read pieces written by U.S. soldiers and their families. A few weeks later, the short-story writer Mavis Gallant makes a rare New York City appearance. She'll be joined on Nov. 1 by Russell Banks, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Michael Ondaatje. (212-864-5400.)

"LIVE FROM THE N.Y.P.L."
The public library's premier lecture series presents the photographer Robert Frank on Sept. 30; he who will discuss pictures of Beirut's wrecked downtown that he took in 1991, following the Lebanese civil war. On a lighter note, *Spy* magazine celebrates what would have been its twentieth anniversary on Nov. 3 with the founding editors, Graydon Carter and Kurt Andersen, and special guests. (212-930-0571.)

FAT CATS
The Cat Fanciers' Association, which celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year, brings the Iams Cat Championship show to Madison Square Garden. Cats from forty breeds, from the American curl shorthair to the Turkish Van, compete for top honors. Kittens are for sale, and rescued cats are up for adoption. (Oct. 14-15. For more information, visit www.cfa.org.)

AUCTIONS
The city's big houses delicately balance the splashy with the sublime. Christie's "40 Years of 'Star Trek' " (on Oct. 5-7), will sell off more than a thousand lots of Star Fleet uniforms, Klingon weapons, and other memorabilia in New York, but enthusiasts from all over the galaxy will be able to participate in real time via Christie's LIVE, a new online feature. Celebrity and connoisseurship meet in Sotheby's sale of David Whitney's collection on Nov. 16. Philip Johnson's longtime partner, Whitney was known for having an eye of legendary acuity. Paintings by Johns, Schnabel, and de Kooning, ceramics by Andrew Lord and Ken Price, and an impressive selection of twentieth-century design objects will be offered. The proceeds will be used for the maintenance of Johnson's Glass House, in New Canaan, Connecticut.

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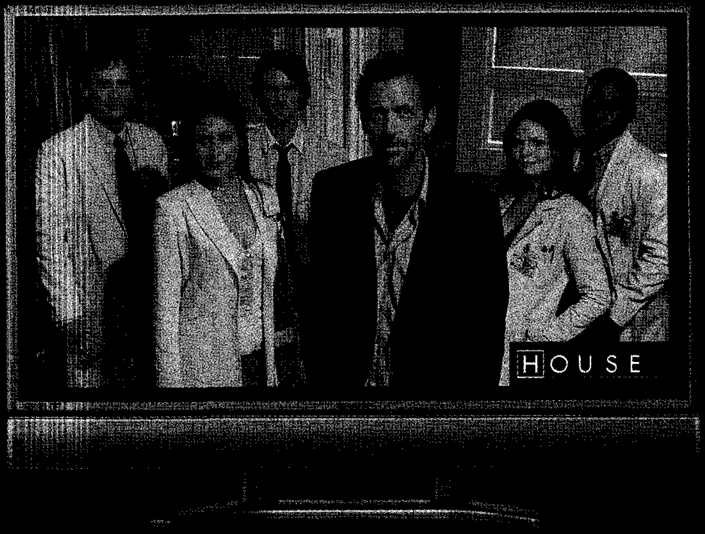
BEHIND THE SCENES



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IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS. Experience the vivid, visceral world of "House" on an AQUOS. The high-quality picture of a full HD 1080p AQUOS Liquid Crystal Television brings everything from the show's smallest medical clues to its biggest dramatic scenes into sharp focus.

A mesmerizing mix of fearless acting, medical mystery, and somatic special effects is the prescription for success on this Emmy Award-winning Fox-TV series. A conversation with **Director Deran Serafian**—who has been with "House" since the end of season one, and is filming seven episodes this third season—reveals the intensive care that goes into developing a show broadcast in HDTV. This is the final installment of a three-part Q&A series.

< Deran Serafian

How important are visuals to telling a story on "House"?

SERAFIAN: The visuals are very important, but they can't get in the way of the story. Trying to combine style with narrative is a challenge. I'm a big fan of Stanley Kubrick's, and "House" is a great opportunity to adapt things I love about his style, such as wide angles and very still frames that move when you're making a point.

Describe the teasers that open the show.

SERAFIAN: Teasers are their own mini films. The teaser for the season opener, "Meaning," was from the point of view of a man immobilized in a wheelchair. We shot reversal stock, which intensifies colors and makes blacks well defined. In HDTV you can fully appreciate this very rich, ultra-saturated look that connotes emotion and builds suspense.

What makes the show's medical special effects so convincing?

SERAFIAN: Our effects team is terrific—but they're a sick bunch: They're like proud cats bringing mice to their owners. I try to find the middle ground, but sometimes the scenes are gross and gory. We're right on the line—and we've crossed it, too.

How does knowing the show is broadcast in HDTV affect your work?

SERAFIAN: I love it. The clearer, the better. It can come up and bite you, though. The other day I looked at the dailies and discovered gnats flying around in a shot. Unless it was broadcast in HDTV, you wouldn't normally see them on film stock. But since you can see them on a quality HDTV screen, we have to paint them out.

Will watching "House" in HDTV change a viewer's experience?

SERAFIAN: It provides an enriched sense of reality. You notice everything. It can be distracting unless everything comes together: The acting, the makeup, the sets, even the blood-in-the-surgery scenes have to look real. Everything is more noticeable on HDTV.

What's in your home theatre?

SERAFIAN: I have an HDTV. I love the crystal-clear picture quality.

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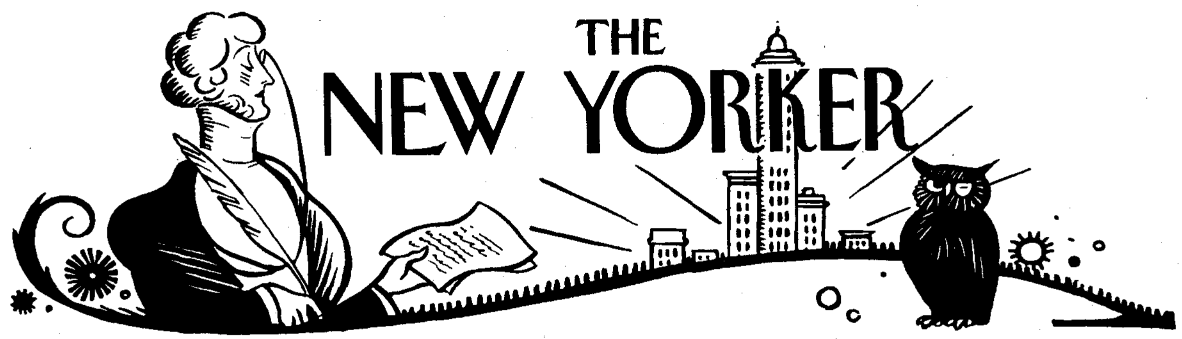
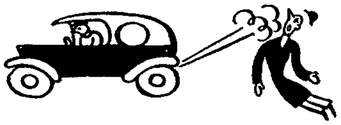


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

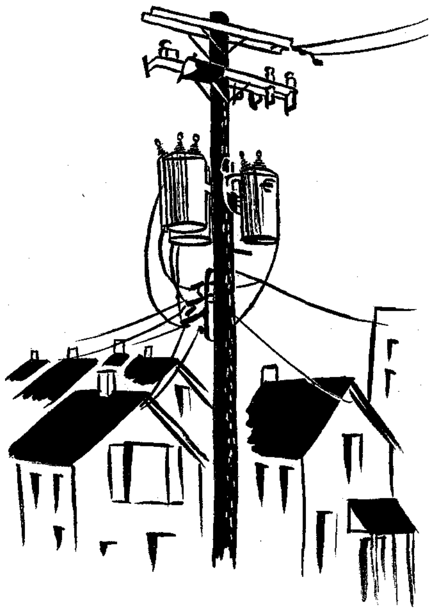
COMMENT
UNTRANSFORMED



A distribution transformer, much, say, like an elevator, is easy to ignore until it malfunctions. Its unromantic job, in most cases, is to take the high-voltage current transmitted over the grid and convert it—or step it down—to the lower-voltage current that emerges from a wall socket. There are an estimated three million distribution transformers in operation in the United States, and virtually all the electricity produced in the country—some four trillion kilowatt hours per year—passes through at least one of them en route from the plant where it was generated to the heating element in your toaster. Along the way, some energy is inevitably lost, and even though proportionately these losses are small, when you're talking about four trillion kilowatt hours they quickly add up.

Last month, more than fourteen years after Congress mandated transformer standards, the Bush Administration finally got around to proposing them. (The original deadline was missed during the Clinton Administration.) To prepare the proposal, the Department of Energy assessed six possible levels of efficiency, ranging from the highest, known in bureaucratese as Trial Standard Level 6, to the lowest, Trial Standard Level 1. According to the department's figures, the ideal balance between the up-front costs and the long-term gains was achieved at Level 4. Nevertheless, the department turned around and recommended a much lower transformer standard, Level 2. The decision obviously makes no sense on environmental grounds—in effect, the department is proposing to squander some twelve billion kilowatt hours per year, or roughly enough electricity to power all the households in Iowa—and also no sense on financial ones: the D.O.E.'s own analysis shows that the net cost of the lower standard will actually be higher over the life of the average transformer, which is estimated to be thirty years. The proposal leaves "billions in savings just sitting on the table," is how Steven Nadel, the executive director of the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy, put it to the *Christian Science Monitor.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



As it happens, right around the same time that the Bush Administration was making its feeble goals public, three thousand miles away, in Sacramento, California, ambitious new standards were being set. The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 may well be the most important piece of legislation passed this year; certainly it is the most far-sighted. When Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signs it, as he has promised to do by the end of next week, California will become the first place in America where climate change is truly taken seriously. The act commits the state to cutting its greenhouse-gas emissions to 2000 levels by 2010—an eleven-per-cent reduction from "business as usual"—and to 1990 levels by 2020: a twenty-nine-per-cent reduction. Significantly, the bill does not depend on voluntary compliance but authorizes the California Air Resources Board to take any steps necessary to enforce the limits. Peter Darbee, the head of the state's largest utility, P.G. & E., whose support was crucial to the bill's passage, said he welcomed the strictness of the regulations as a spur to innovation. "The incentives really aren't there for the creation of new technologies and investments to reduce carbon dioxide unless mandatory caps are put in place," he told the *Times.*

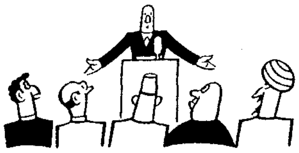
California's actions have nothing to do with the Department of Energy's, and, of course, everything to do with them. Six years ago, when George W. Bush was running for President, he called global warming a serious problem, and pledged, if elected, to regulate CO_2 emissions. Practically his first move after taking office was to break that pledge. In the years since, his only actions on climate change have been to block, blunt, and subvert the well-meaning efforts of others. Currently, for example, California is trying to impose new auto-emissions standards that would cover greenhouse gases like CO_2 and methane. The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers is fighting the requirements in court, and the Bush Administration, which California asked for help in implementing the rules, has instead come down on the side of the carmakers. (A couple of years ago, the Administration helped kill California's "zero emission vehicle" mandate.)

President Bush likes to portray himself as a man of unwavering optimism. "And so we move forward—optimistic about our country, faithful to its cause, and confident of the victories to come," he declared at the close of his most recent State of the Union address. "Ours is an agenda that is optimistic," he told the Republican National Governors Association the following month. "We believe in America. We believe in the ingenuity of the American people." "We're really an optimistic people," he recently informed the Australian Prime Minister. Of all the many ingenious American things this President is optimistic about, technology is supposedly near the top of the list. "And technology will once again make this country the leader in the world, and that's what we're here to celebrate," he told a group of Californians this past Earth Day.

Just about every decision that the Administration has made on energy policy belies these claims. If you examine Bush's record, you find that the technologies he supports are either those which were developed in the past—coal mining and oil drilling—or those which lie securely in the future: cars and buses that zip around on hydrogen. When presented with new technologies that could actually change the way Americans live in the here and now, the White House wants nothing to do with them. Methods currently exist, for instance, to cut mercury emissions from power plants by as much as ninety per cent; the Administration is uninterested. Similarly, there are already (Japanese-made) cars on the road that comfortably seat a family of five and get more than fifty miles to the gallon. Yet it is only in recent months that the White House has begun to investigate the possibility of raising fuel-efficiency standards for automobiles, which have languished at twenty-seven and a half miles per gallon for the past twenty years. The new transformer rules are the first efficiency goals the Bush Administration has proposed; meanwhile, the D.O.E. has missed deadlines to raise standards for equipment ranging from dishwashers to fluorescent-lamp ballasts (and has been sued by fifteen states for its negligence). This is not the record of a technological optimist, of someone who believes in the "ingenuity of the American people." This is the record of a pessimist.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

DEPT. OF EVERLASTING PEACE
SWAMI

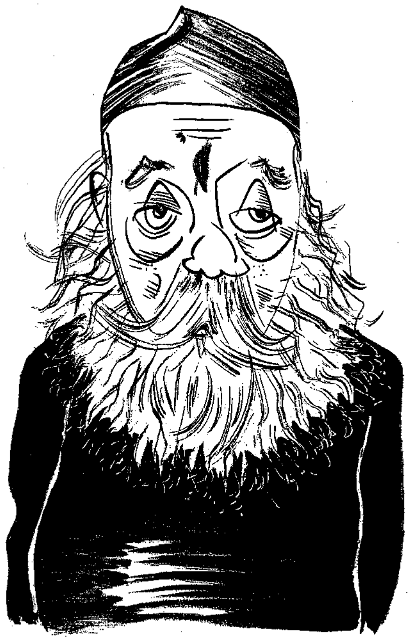


Ever since Kofi Annan took on the role of Secretary-General of the United Nations, ten years ago, the opening day of the General Assembly has been accompanied by an interfaith prayer service at St. Bartholomew's Church, on Park Avenue. And every year that service has commenced with a demonstration of respiratory virtuosity by Swami Bua.

Swami Bua is a hundred and seventeen years old, or, at least, is said to be. He has many enthusiasms—swimming, boxing, breathing through the eyes—but the one that recommends him to the U.N. each fall is the conch. He can (supposedly) blow on a conch shell for eight straight days: one note, one breath, a hundred and ninety-four hours. It is a feat of circular breathing that would make Rahsaan Roland Kirk blush.

Swamiji ("-ji" is the honorific) lives on the eleventh floor of a postwar tower on West Fifty-eighth Street. His apartment is the one with the sign on the door that reads, "To Ring Well Please Press Well the Bottom Bell." It contains a studio, where he teaches two yoga classes each weekday. At dawn, last Tuesday, on the morning of the service, he was seated in the studio, dressed in orange robes and socks, and black shoes with Velcro straps. He had a flowing white beard and a smudge of ash on his forehead which identifies him as a follower of Shiva. His face brought to mind both the knob on an old walking stick and an ancient Yosemite Sam.

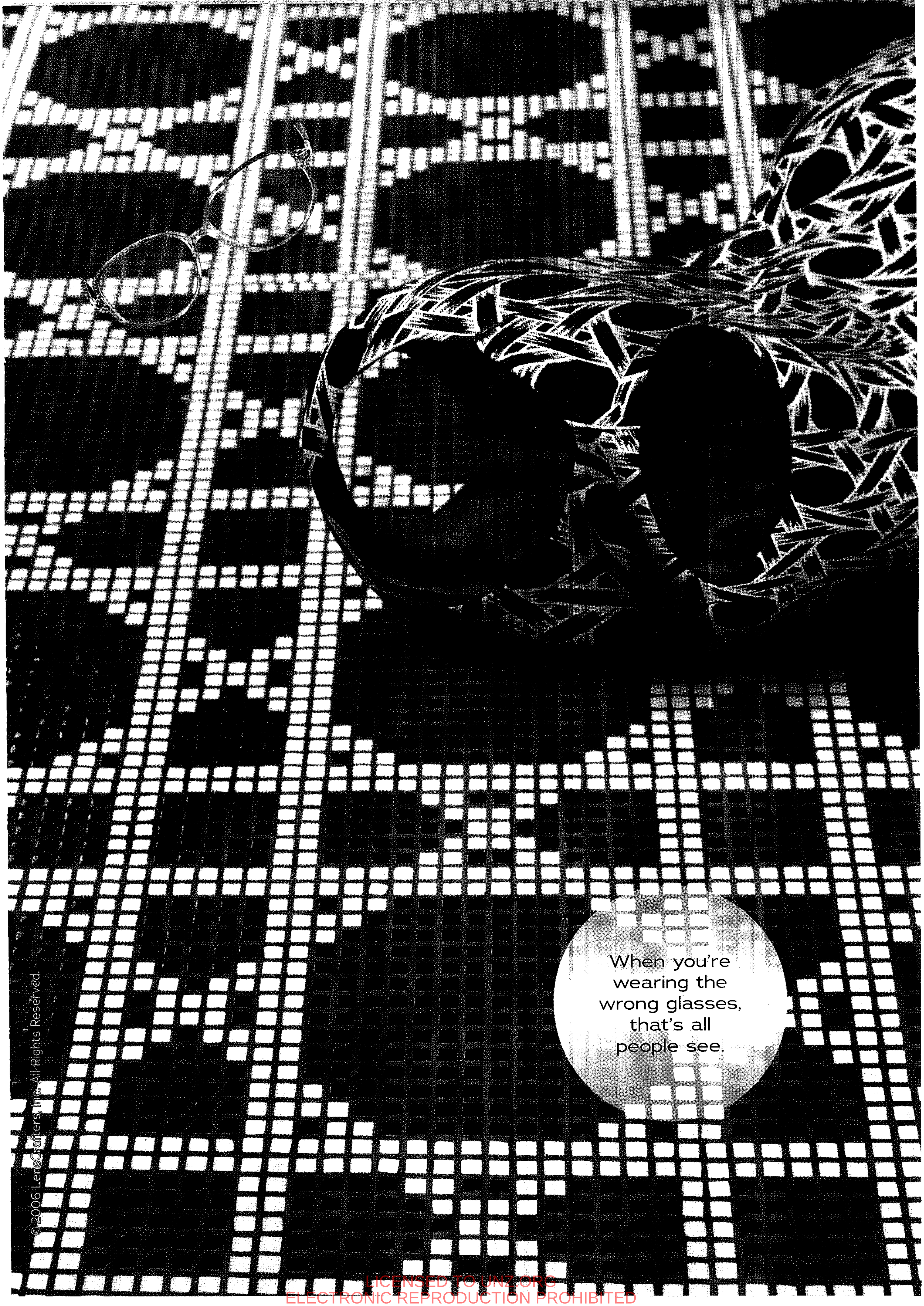
He greeted a guest by holding out two Italian herbal lozenges and exclaiming, gruffly, "How's your father?" This query later proved less startling than it at first seemed; he asked it of others, none of whom, of course, asked it of him. The walls were hung with photographs of a youthful, loinclothed Swami Bua—in his eighties, maybe—and when the guest pointed them out the Swami shouted, "Looking good!" Indeed. Each declaration ended with a burst of impish laughter. "I have no glass," he said, pointing to his eyes. "I am glassless man! Heh heh heh."



Swami Bua

The guest had been instructed to take Swamiji by taxi to St. Bart's, where he was to issue the service's call to prayer by blowing on his conch. A student of the Swami, Sanjay Attada, came along, carrying the conch in an embroidered orange leather bag. "I will not let you down," Swamiji barked. "I will pick you up!" Out on the street, among the garbage trucks, the Swami seemed a Day-Glo gnome.

In the taxi, he began to tell unintelligible stories about Haile Selassie and about wrestling Ethiopian sheep. At one point, he wondered whether the driver


When you're
wearing the
wrong glasses,
that's all
people see.

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was Indian. (Swami Bua comes from Tamil Nadu, in southern India.) He was Haitian, however, and he was listening to Christian radio, and as the Jesus talk gave way to a brass processional the Swami commanded Attada to produce the conch. It was tipped with silver at both ends. He began to blow. The sound of the conch joined that of the brass and of the sirens in the street. The driver spun around, beaming. When the ride was over, he said to the Swami, in a booming voice, "We will meet again."

The chapel at St. Bart's slowly filled with dignitaries, and therefore the vestments and cell-phone ringtones, of many faiths: Jain, Shintoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Yoruba, Mi'kmaq, Christian, Muslim, Jew. The service was organized, at Annan's urging, by the Interfaith Center of New York, as a way to conjoin delegates of the world's religions in a prayer for peace. (This year, Annan's last as secretary-general, was, alas, his second as an absentee.) Each priest/monk/rabbi would have a minute or so in which to do his or her thing. The Swami marvelled at a photographer and her assistant. "Girls are very pretty!" he exclaimed. "She has good muscles." He squeezed the photographer's left bicep and sighed. "God bless you," he said.

Swamiji led a procession into the church and, once everyone was seated, inched forward with his conch. He stood at the microphone. "Go?" he yelled. He raised the shell and began to play. He held the note for more than a minute, and then finished with two short blasts.

When all the prayers were done (nothing left out except perhaps "O Canada"), everyone walked down the nave, the Swami waving like a beauty queen. The religious leaders hugged and chattered in the hall.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

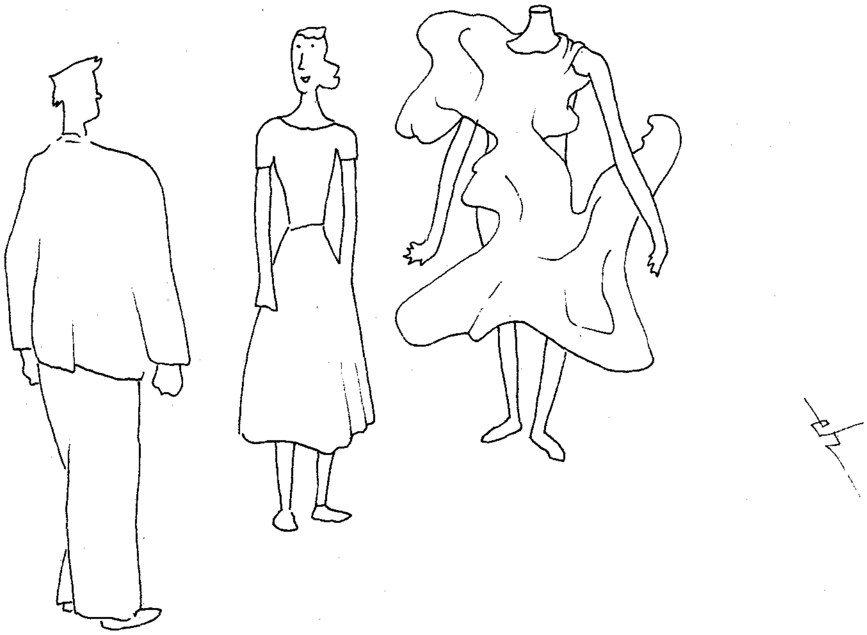
THE PICTURES
TRU, TWO

In the summer of 2003, after two years of research and writing, Douglas McGrath finished "Infamous," his screenplay based on the life of Truman Capote. As he had promised to do, he called his friend Bingham Ray, who was the executive on his last film, "Nicholas Nickleby."

"Good news," said McGrath, who also co-wrote "Bullets Over Broadway" with Woody Allen, and adapted and directed "Emma." "I finished my script!"

"I know," Ray said. "I've got it on my desk!"

"And I paused," McGrath recalled the other day, over lunch at La Grenouille, "and I said, 'Uh, no you don't, because I have it on *my* desk.'"



"You don't wear it, darling—it wears you."

"No, it's right here," Ray insisted. "'Capote,' by Dan—" There followed, McGrath said, "what is known in the Wasp community as a polite pause."

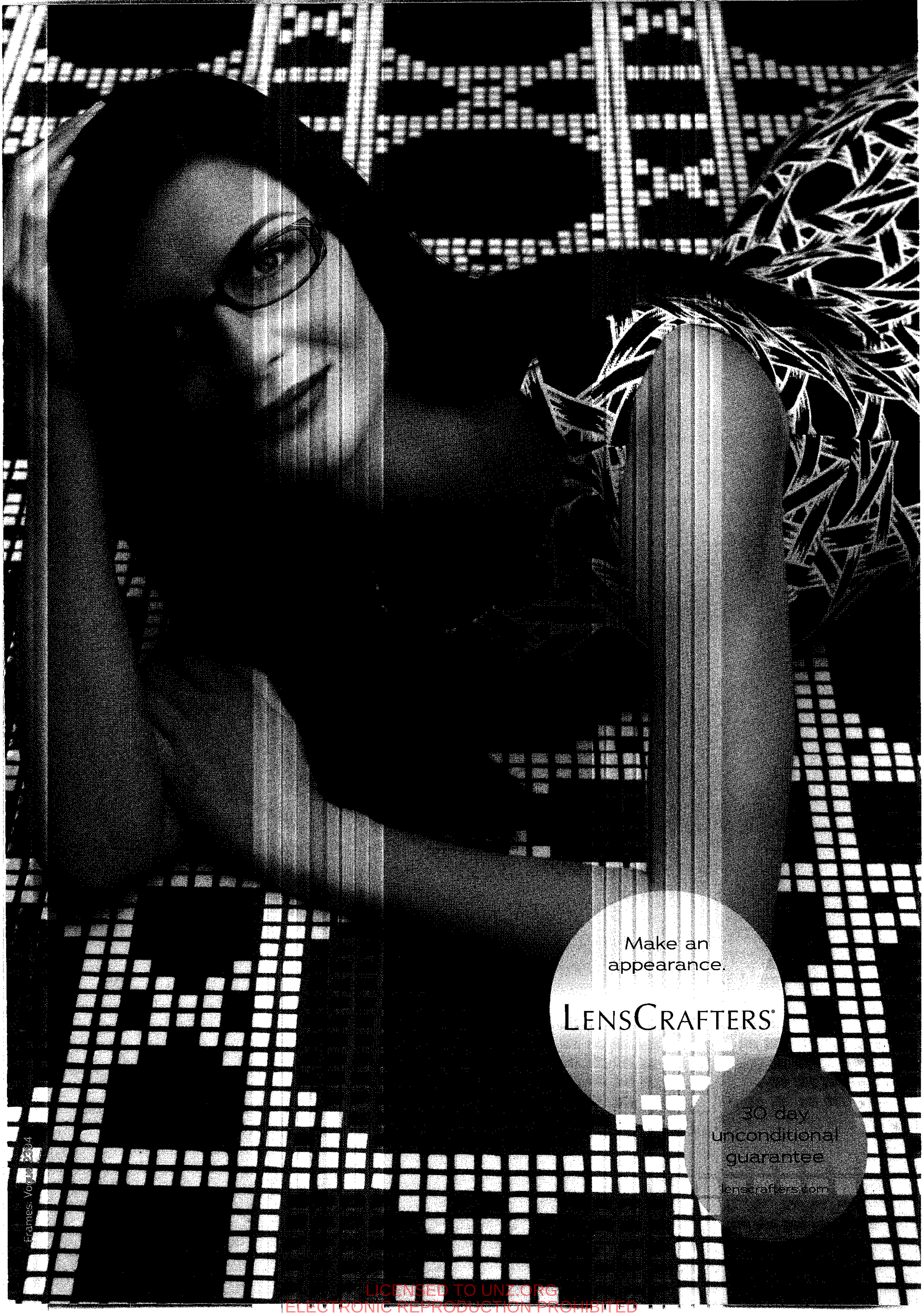
Ray had another Capote script on his desk. To make matters worse, this script, by Dan Futterman, concerned the same period in Capote's life that "Infamous" did—the years during which he was working on "In Cold Blood."

"It's very strange," McGrath said, sitting up straight on the burgundy-colored banquette. McGrath, forty-eight, has thin blond hair, very good manners, a slight Texas accent, and he speaks in perfect sentences. "I mean, generally I have my finger on whatever the opposite of the Zeitgeist is. What are the chances of two scripts about Truman Capote going out at the same time?"

Futterman's "Capote" ended up getting made first, and went on to earn an Academy Award nomination for best picture and an Oscar for its star, Philip Seymour Hoffman. "Infamous," with the unknown British actor Toby Jones in the lead role, went into production a few months after "Capote," but Warner Independent, which financed the film, decided to hold it for a year. It opens on October 13th.

There are precedents for this kind of thing. In 1989, Milos Forman's "Valmont" covered the same ground as Stephen Frears's 1988 hit "Dangerous Liaisons"; hardly anyone saw "Valmont." In 1997, two volcano movies appeared, "Dante's Peak" followed by "Volcano"; again, the second one suffered. However, in 1998 two comet-hits-the-earth movies were released—"Deep Impact" then "Armageddon"—and both were hits. The makers of "Infamous" prefer to focus on that example. But whether a five-foot-three-inch writer from Monroeville, Alabama, holds the same universal fascination as the end of the world remains to be seen.

"Infamous" is funnier and gayer than "Capote," and it also shows a lot more of the author's New York life amid his society-lady "swans." La Grenouille, which has been on Fifty-second Street just east of Fifth Avenue since 1962, is the setting for several scenes, one with Babe Paley, played by Sigourney Weaver, and another with Marella Agnelli, played by Isabella Rossellini. McGrath and his production designer re-created the restaurant at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Troublemaker Studios in Austin, where much of the film was shot.

"There's something about the goldenness of the light that we could never quite capture," McGrath said, looking up toward the ceiling. "It's the silk wall fabric, but it's also the way the sunlight comes through the glorious flower arrangements."

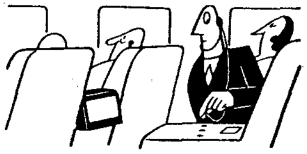
McGrath was seated at Capote's old table, the first banquette on the left. The restaurant's owner, Charles Masson, who is the son of the founder, drifted by to say that Capote had liked this table because it was relatively hidden: people arriving instinctively looked farther back in the room.

McGrath has not seen "Capote," which he and his friends refer to as "Tom," for The Other Movie. "I don't want to get into the position of commenting on it artistically," he said.

McGrath is an excellent mimic, and throughout lunch he dropped into his own version of Truman, lolling sideways in the banquette, and sounding just like "what a Brussels sprout would sound like if a Brussels sprout could talk," as Michael Panes, the actor who plays Gore Vidal, says in the film. McGrath succeeded in conjuring the dead writer from the silky velvet corner that had been his perch, and for a few moments he made it seem that one could never have enough Tru. But then he had to run—he was off to present his film at the Toronto Film Festival. The shade of Capote departed with him, as the sunlight faded from the golden walls of the dining room.

—*John Seabrook*

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
AIR KISS



American Airlines Flight 45—departing Charles de Gaulle at 10:40 A.M., arriving J.F.K. at one each afternoon—is a tourist's delight: timed just right to avoid late checkout, leaving time for one last Kir Royale at Les Deux Magots. On August 22nd, the coach cabin was packed with vacationing New Yorkers. Ralph Jackson (21A) and David Leisner (21B) were returning from two weeks in France, while Huffa Frobes-Cross (21F) had stopped over in Paris on his way back from South Africa. Assigned to seats 20A and 20B were George Tsikhiseli, a television journalist, and his writer boyfriend, Stephan Varnier. "We've been together only four months," Tsikhiseli said last week. "So it felt like a honeymoon."

Twelve days earlier, British police had foiled a terrorist plot to blow up airliners. Heightened security had delayed the flight by about two hours, and passengers, by the time they boarded, were ready to relax. "I had a José Saramago book I was looking forward to reading," Leisner said. "And then I was going to take some melatonin and have a little nap."

Shortly after takeoff, Varnier nodded off, leaning his head on Tsikhiseli. A stewardess came over to their row. "The purser wants you to stop that," she said.

"I opened my eyes and was, like, 'Stop what?' " Varnier recalled the other day.

"The touching and the kissing," the stewardess said, before walking away.

Tsikhiseli and Varnier were taken aback. "He would rest his head on my shoulder or the other way around. We'd kiss—not *kiss* kiss, just *mwah*," Tsikhiseli recalled, making a smacking sound.

In the row behind them were Leisner and Jackson. "They were like two lovebirds," said Leisner, who is a classical guitarist. Frobes-Cross, a Columbia grad student who was sitting across the aisle, had overheard the stewardess's decree, too. "First thing I catch is 'You have to stop touching each other,' " he said. "And I'm, like, Whoa, that's really weird."

Leisner and Jackson, who were "astounded," leaned forward to ask if they'd heard correctly. When Tsikhiseli and Varnier confirmed that they had, the four men summoned a stewardess and asked to speak with the purser.

A little later, the purser appeared at Row 20. She was, by all accounts, calm and professional; to the men's surprise, she said that she knew nothing about the incident and had not instructed the stewardess to tell Tsikhiseli and Varnier to stop touching each other.

"Which stewardess was it?" she asked.

One of the men pointed out the stewardess—a woman with, as Jackson put it, "Texas hair, like from the nineteen-sixties." According to Leisner, the purser rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, say no more. I know."

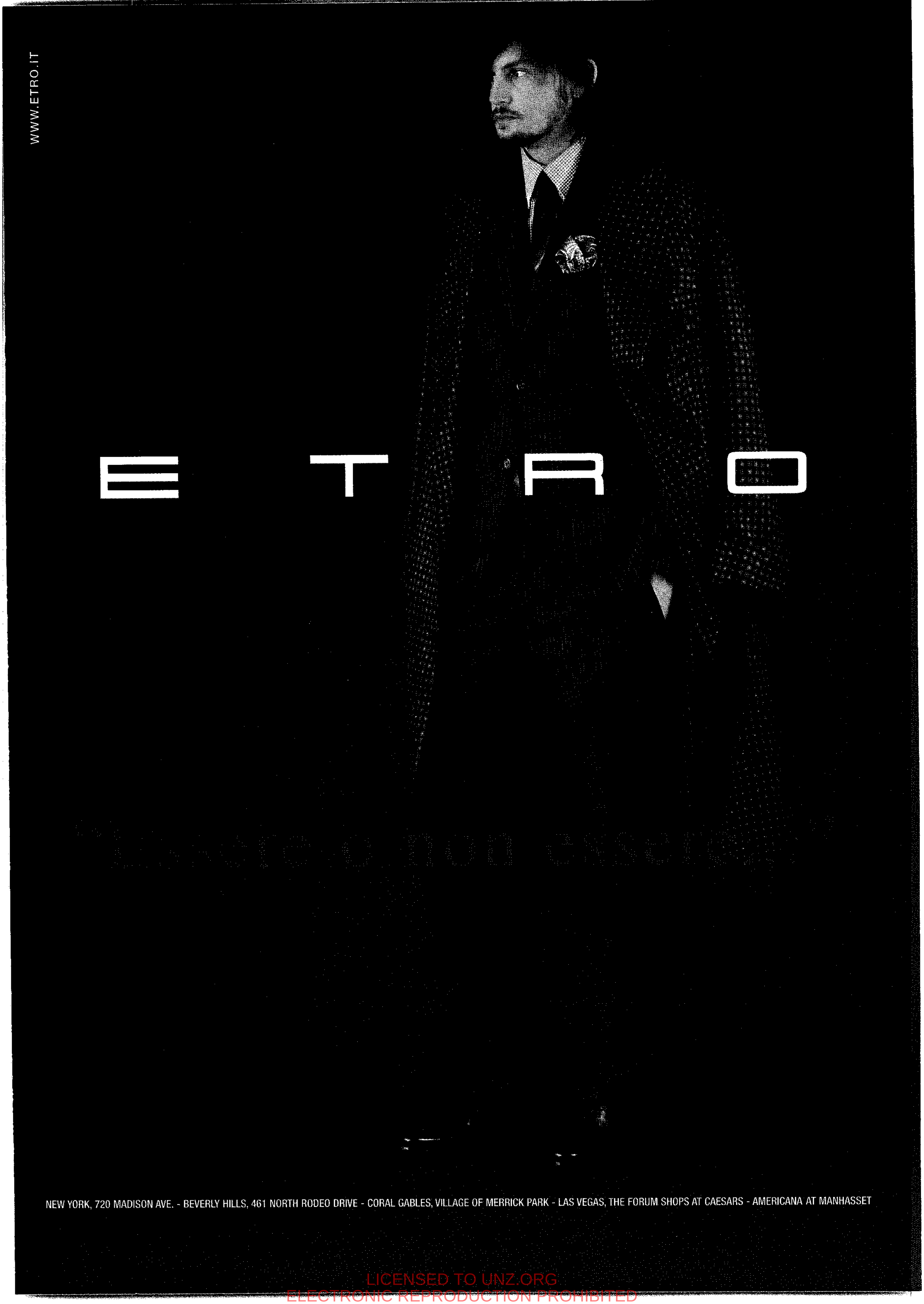
The purser asked the men to describe what they'd been doing, and she acknowledged that their behavior had not been inappropriate. Tsikhiseli then asked if the stewardess would have made the request if the kissers had been a man and a woman. Suddenly, Leisner said, the purser "became very rigid." Contradicting what she'd told them before, she stiffly said, "Kissing is inappropriate behavior on an airplane." She then said that she was busy with the meal service and promised to come back.

Half an hour later, the purser returned, this time saying that some passengers had complained about Tsikhiseli and Varnier's behavior earlier. The men asked more questions. Who had complained? (She couldn't say.) Could they have the stewardess's name, or employee number? (No.) Would the purser arrange for an American Airlines representative to meet them upon landing at J.F.K.? (Not possible.) Finally, the purser said that if they didn't drop the matter the flight would be diverted. After that, Leisner said, "everyone shut up for a while."

Maybe an hour later, the purser approached Tsikhiseli and said that the captain wanted to talk to him. Tsikhiseli went up to the galley and gave the captain his business card. The captain told Tsikhiseli that if they didn't stop arguing with the crew he would indeed divert the plane. "I want you to go back to your seat and behave the rest of the flight, and we'll see you in New York," he said. Tsikhiseli returned to coach.

Tim Wagner, a spokesman for American, said that the stewardess's injunction to the men was reasonable, and would have been made whether the couple was gay or straight. "Our passengers need to recognize that they are in an environment with all ages, backgrounds, creeds, and races. We have an obligation to make as many of them feel as comfortable as possible," he said. (He added, "Our understanding is that the level of affection was more than a quick peck on the cheek.") But a customer-service representative named Terri, reached last week on the telephone, offered the opinion that kissing on airplanes is indeed permissible. "Oh, yeah! Sure. I've seen couples who are on honeymoons," she said. "They just don't want you to go into the bathroom together."

—*Lauren Collins*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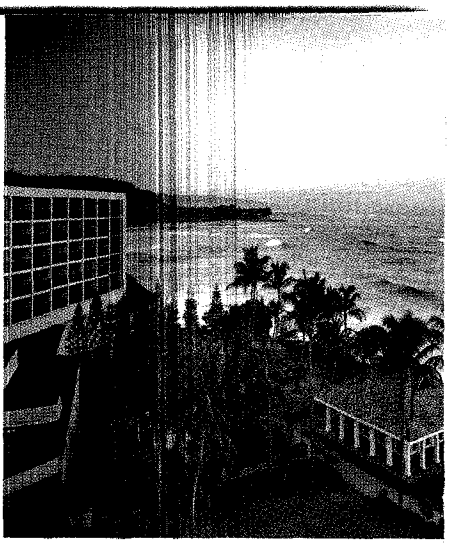

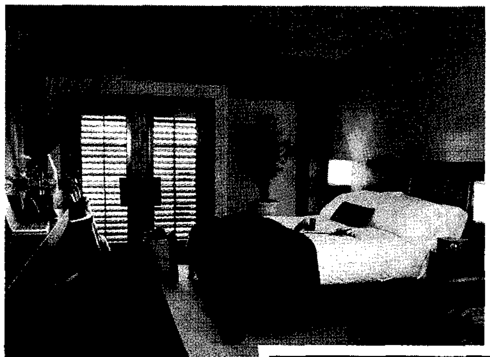

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For golfers in Orlando, **The Villas of Grand Cypress** is nirvana: forty-five holes of Jack Nicklaus-designed golf set within 1,500 beautifully landscaped acres. The "Good Life" proves there's even more here. A bottle of bubbly welcomes you to your one-bedroom villa. Days start with a full breakfast and offer the diversions of an equestrian center, tennis, and an Audubon preserve. At night, The Black Swan, a AAA Four Diamond restaurant, tempts with exemplars of cosmopolitan cuisine and complimentary wine.

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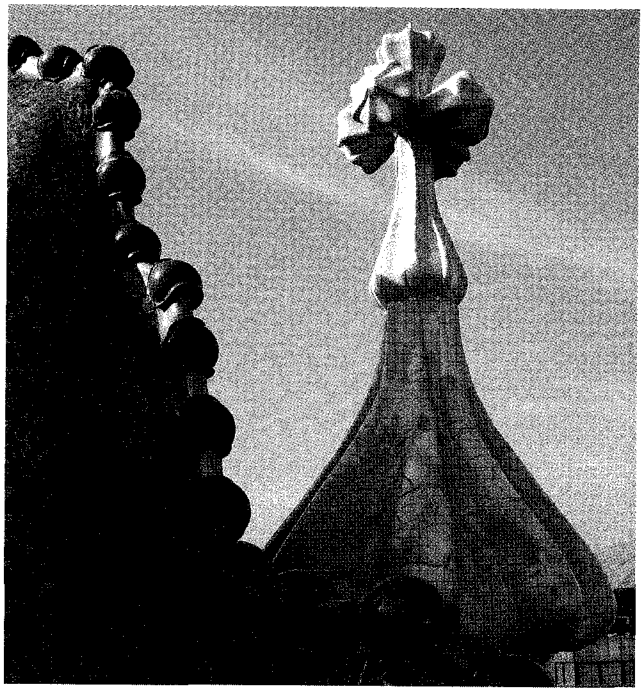

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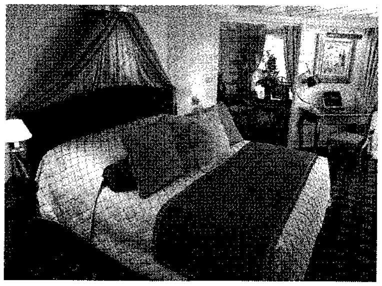

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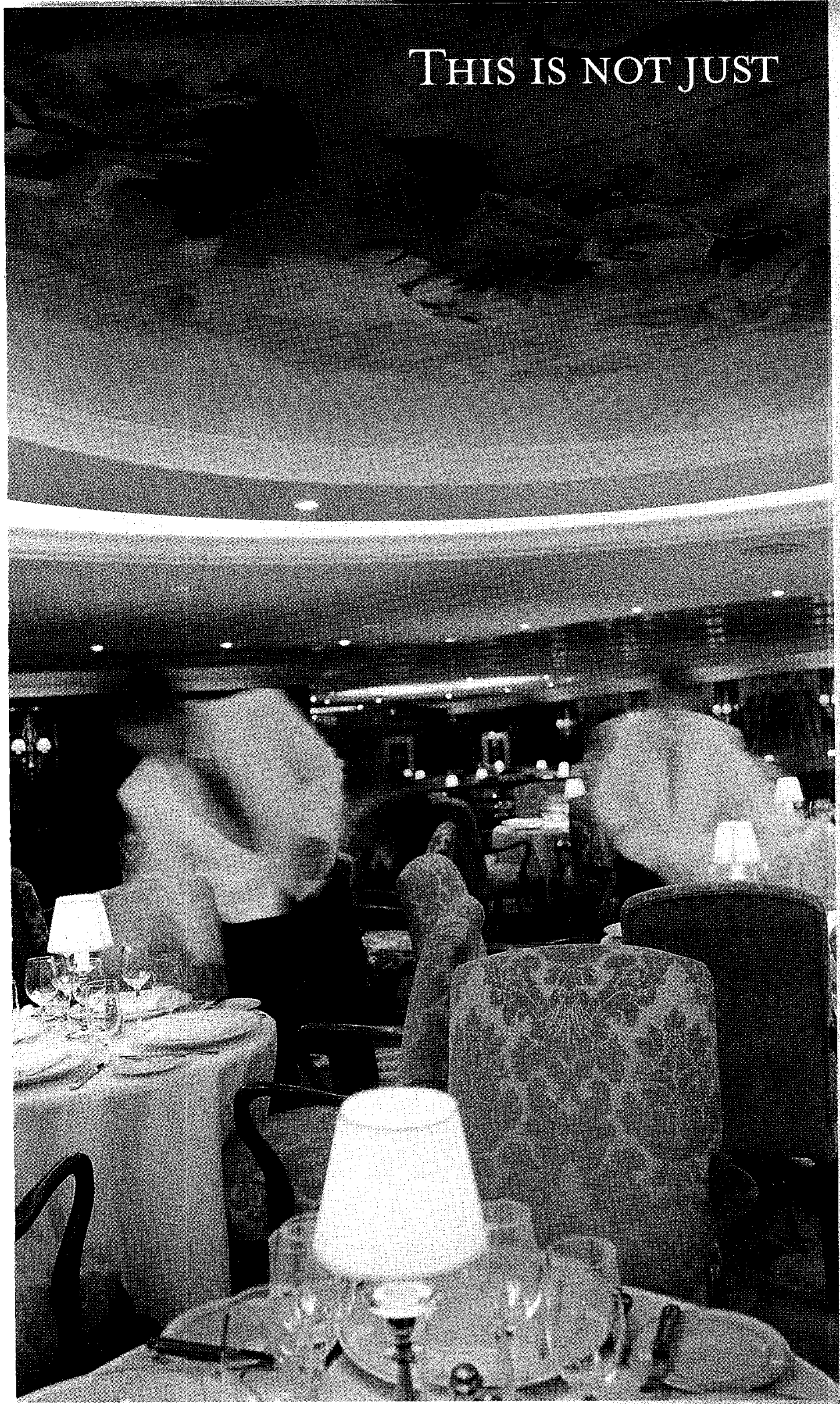

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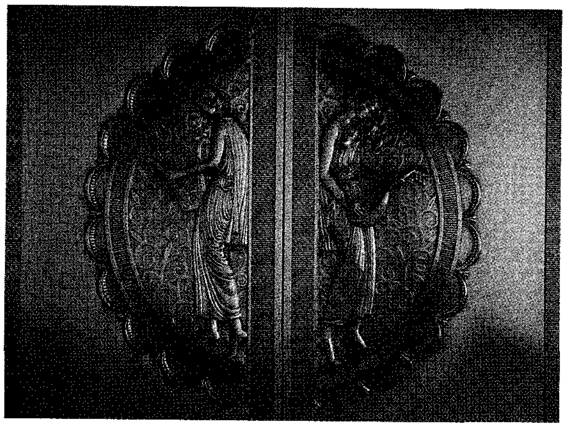

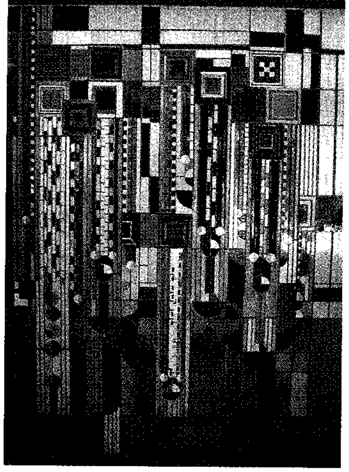

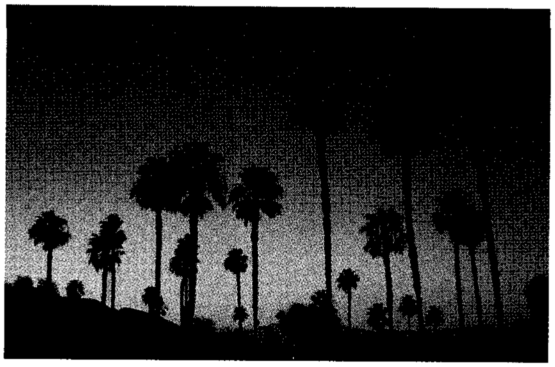

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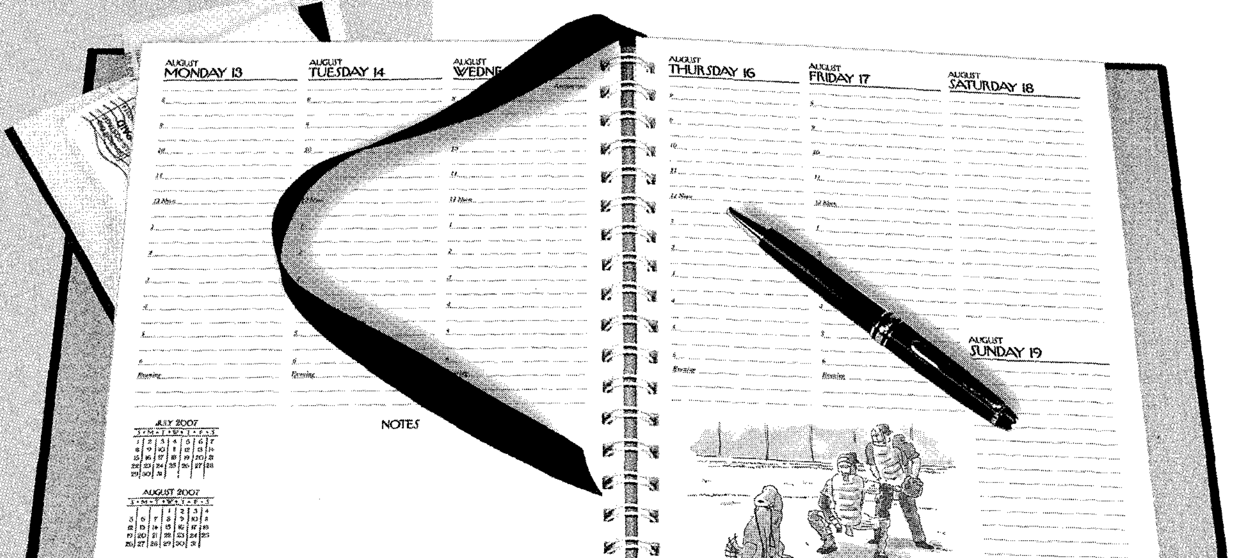
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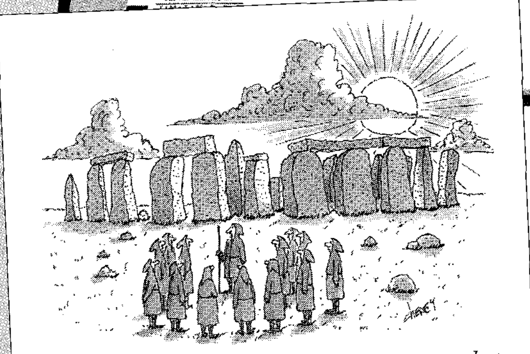

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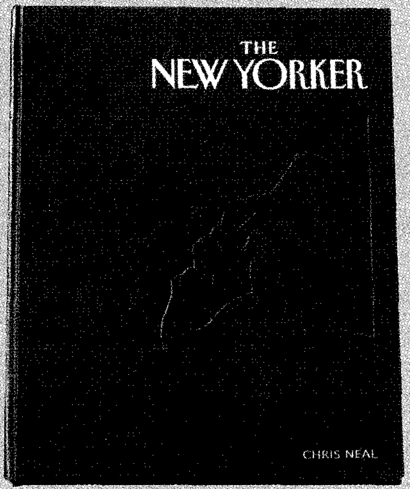
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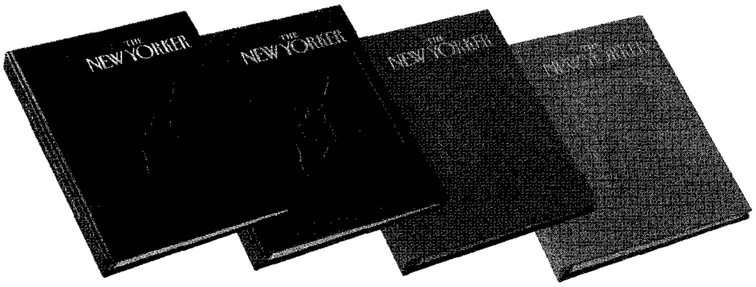

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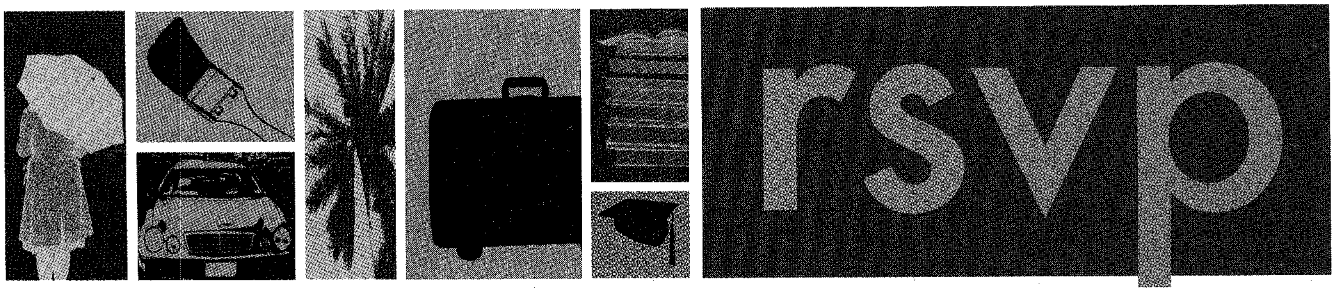

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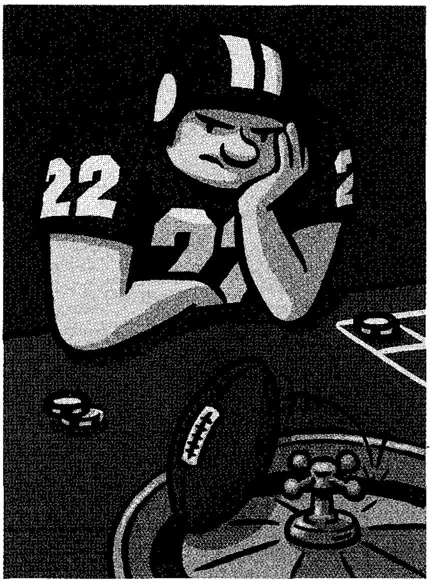
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
WAGERS OF SIN

It's fall, and an American's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of betting on the N.F.L. It is, of course, illegal to bet on sports in the U.S., unless you're in Nevada, but in the past five years many Americans have started using the Internet to bet with bookmakers in countries that permit sports betting. This has turned online sports betting into a huge industry; last year, Americans placed an estimated six billion dollars in online bets. But two months ago F.B.I. agents arrested David Carruthers, the C.E.O. of the British bookmaker Betonsports.com, while he was changing planes in Texas, and, after he was charged with racketeering, conspiracy, and fraud, the company announced that it would no longer do business with American bettors. Two weeks ago, police arrested the chairman of another British bookmaker, Sportingbet.com, when he touched down in New York. And in July the House of Representatives passed a bill explicitly banning online gambling and prohibiting American banks from sending their customers' money to bookmakers. Suddenly, the local candy-store bookie is starting to look a lot better.

The members of Congress behind the House bill framed it as a sensible response to a "mushrooming epidemic" of underage gambling and a burgeoning "national-security problem" (since some Internet bookies are allegedly terrorist fronts). But it's really just the latest chapter in America's love-hate relationship with gambling. Americans have been avid gamblers from the start—Jamestown itself was funded via a lottery, and the nineteenth century saw a boom in gambling on cards and horses—but a powerful puritanical streak has led to periodic clampdowns. Lotteries, though legal in all thirteen colonies, had become illegal by the end of the nineteenth century, only to be resurrected in the nineteen-sixties. Similarly, at the start of the twentieth century Progressive politicians, decrying betting as a "source of misery and vice," shut down nearly every racetrack in the nation. But, two decades later, states desperate for revenue reopened the tracks, and found a huge audience. And today, while sports betting may be illegal, the laws are typically underenforced. The daily point spreads printed in most newspapers testify to the ubiquity of gambling, and, vociferously as the N.F.L. and the N.C.A.A. oppose gambling, they also owe a great deal of their popularity to it.

Such schizophrenic thinking has become institutionalized, so that, even as Americans are prevented from getting a bet down on the Giants-Cowboys game, they're encouraged to play blackjack and buy lottery tickets. Forty-eight of the fifty states now have some form of gambling. Thirty-eight states have lotteries, which yielded sixteen billion dollars in revenue for state governments last year. There are nearly nine hundred casinos, which generate five billion dollars a year in tax revenue. In South Dakota, taxes on gambling account for nearly fifteen per cent of the state's revenue, while Connecticut gets close to four hundred million dollars a year from the slot machines at the Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos. And not all sports betting is unacceptable: the House bill includes an exception for the $15-billion racetrack-betting industry.



Incoherent public policy is nothing new in Washington, of course. But our crazy-quilt approach to gambling leads to a raft of perverse consequences. In the first place, it means that the worst forms of gambling—from an economic perspective—are legal in most of the country, while a better form is outlawed. Lotteries and most casino games are games of pure chance; the house has an ineradicable advantage and, over time, the inevitable outcome is that gamblers lose. Mathematically speaking, as the saying goes, no one wins the lottery. Sports betting, by contrast, involves skill, and it is possible, although very difficult, to consistently win money on it. Sports bettors are closer to stock or commodities buyers than to people who buy lottery tickets. How much difference is there, after all, between betting on the future price of wheat (an activity banned in some states in the nineteenth century) and betting on the performance of a baseball team?

Furthermore, the ban on online betting is hindering the development of new markets that could predict far more important outcomes than that of the N.B.A. finals. In the past few years, a host of prediction markets, as they're usually called, have appeared online, offering people the chance to speculate on subjects ranging from the box-office performance of Hollywood films to the outcome of Presidential elections and the spread of bird flu. These markets' forecasts have proved remarkably accurate—just as bettors collectively do an exceptionally good job of predicting sports results. (In 2004, for instance, Tradesports, a Dublin-based prediction market, called thirty-three out of thirty-four races in the Senate correctly, and called all fifty states correctly in the results for the electoral college.) But in the U.S. these markets have to use play money, because using real money would constitute gambling. The online gambling ban prevents these markets from getting bigger and more accurate.

That might seem an acceptable cost if the war on Internet betting looked set to accomplish its goals. Instead, it's likely to make the problems it was designed to solve worse. Online bookmakers have been portrayed as shady operators, but the biggest of them are far more transparent and easy to regulate than illegal bookies, many of whom have ties to organized crime. David Carruthers, before he was arrested, had been actively calling for the regulation of his industry. Congress may think that driving bettors back underground can curb underage gambling and money laundering, but don't bet on it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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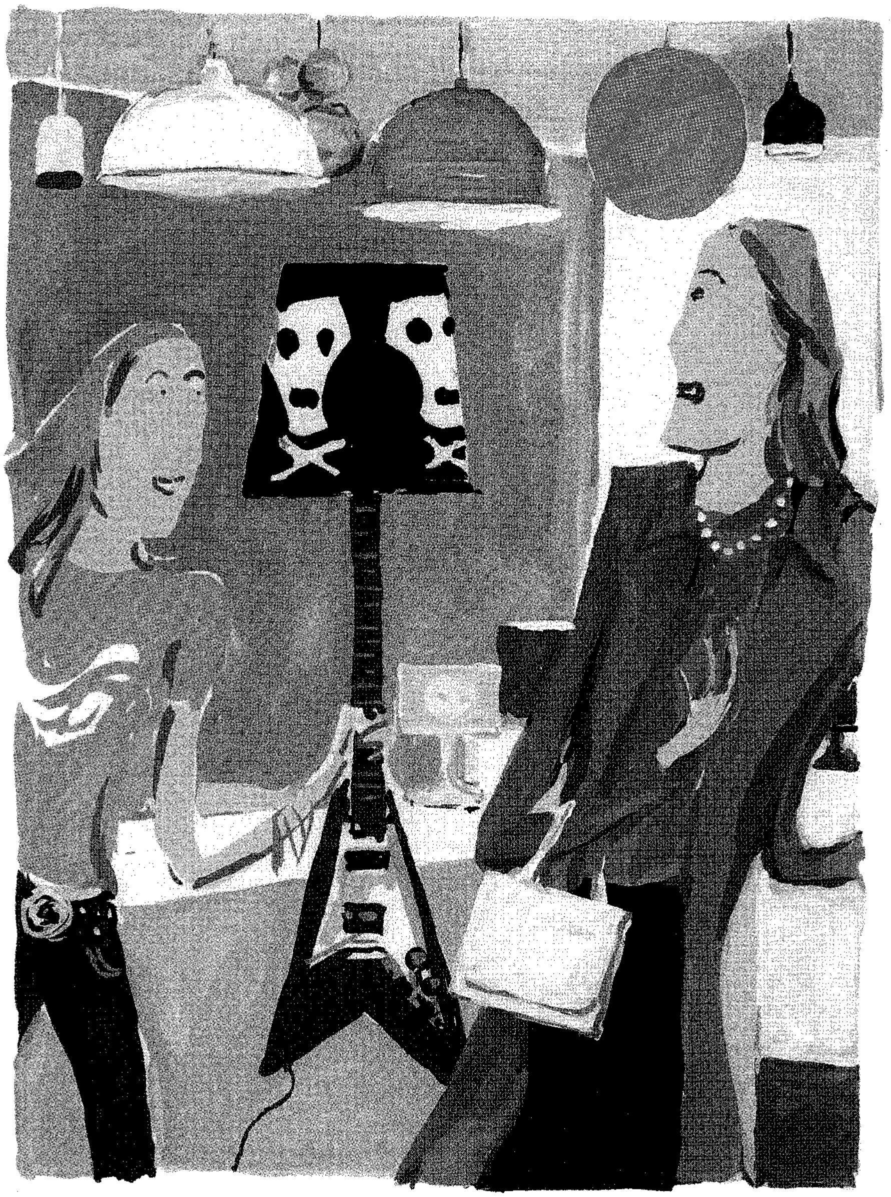
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

COOL ENOUGH FOR SCHOOL

What to buy for the backpack.

BY PATRICIA MARX



JEAN-PHILIPPE DELHOMME

Girls threw God-knows-what into carts. Mothers asked, "Do you really need that?"

I think I speak for everyone, with the possible exception of the home-schooled, when I say that September, thanks to its leadoff position in the academic calendar, is one fraught month. This is true whether you are in first grade, twelfth grade, or forty-ninth grade (once a student, always a student, angst-wise). Fortunately, the awfulness of autumn brings with it hope and resolve. This year, you will not doodle. This year, you will keep your locker neat. This year, you will be popular. Yes, this year will be different!

But only if you have the right stuff. For without the precisely correct highlighter pen, self-stick punched-paper reinforcements, jean jacket, vintage-inspired T-shirt, and sugary snack in your lunchbox, you will surely lose your way.

I should know. I am the heiress to the Marx Office Products and Printing Company, a little store that was founded in Philadelphia in 1923 by my grandfather, who was later joined at the office by my father, then my mother, and then my brother. Our house was so blessed with stationery goods that one day my mother, opening a fresh box of Eberhard Faber No. 2s, turned to me and asked, "Do you ever use a pencil twice?" I can thank the family business for providing me with the gold stars that I, as a second grader, needed to fake success on my spelling tests; and also for imbuing me with the feeling that anything was possible as long as you had a ream of twenty-pound Corrasable Bond.

In my house, every day was back-to-school day, so perhaps we should hear from someone else. Twelve-year-old Pearl Mutnick is a seventh grader at Hunter College High School who has ardent convictions about school supplies. "I really, really, really like Dixon Ticonderoga pencils," Pearl told me on the phone from Fire Island. "If you get Staples-brand pencils, the erasers don't work well. I also like Mirado Black Warriors. They are circular, so they are easy to hold in your hand and they don't come out grainy or splinter off in pencil sharpeners." (Cedar Yellow Wood Ticonderoga pencils, $1.48 for a dozen, at Dick Blick Art Materials, 1-5 Bond Street; $2.19 for a dozen Paper Mate Mirado Black Warrior pencils through Amazon.)

According to the National Retail Federation, the average family will spend five hundred and twenty-seven dollars on back-to-school merchandise this year. Most of those dollars seem to be spent at Staples the day before school starts, a day on which I urge you to stay away from all branches of that superstore unless you're having, say, a life-or-death paper-clip crisis. Actually, Staples, the world's largest office-supply retail chain, irks me the other days of the year, too, for it, along with the advent of an economy that does not favor the mom-and-pop-and-brother store, crushed Marx Office Products the way a competitively discounted steel office desk might demolish an expanding file folder. But Staples is a first-rate establishment. It is cheap, it

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"It's not difficult—you go 'Hi,' then 'Ho,' then the name of your horse."

• •

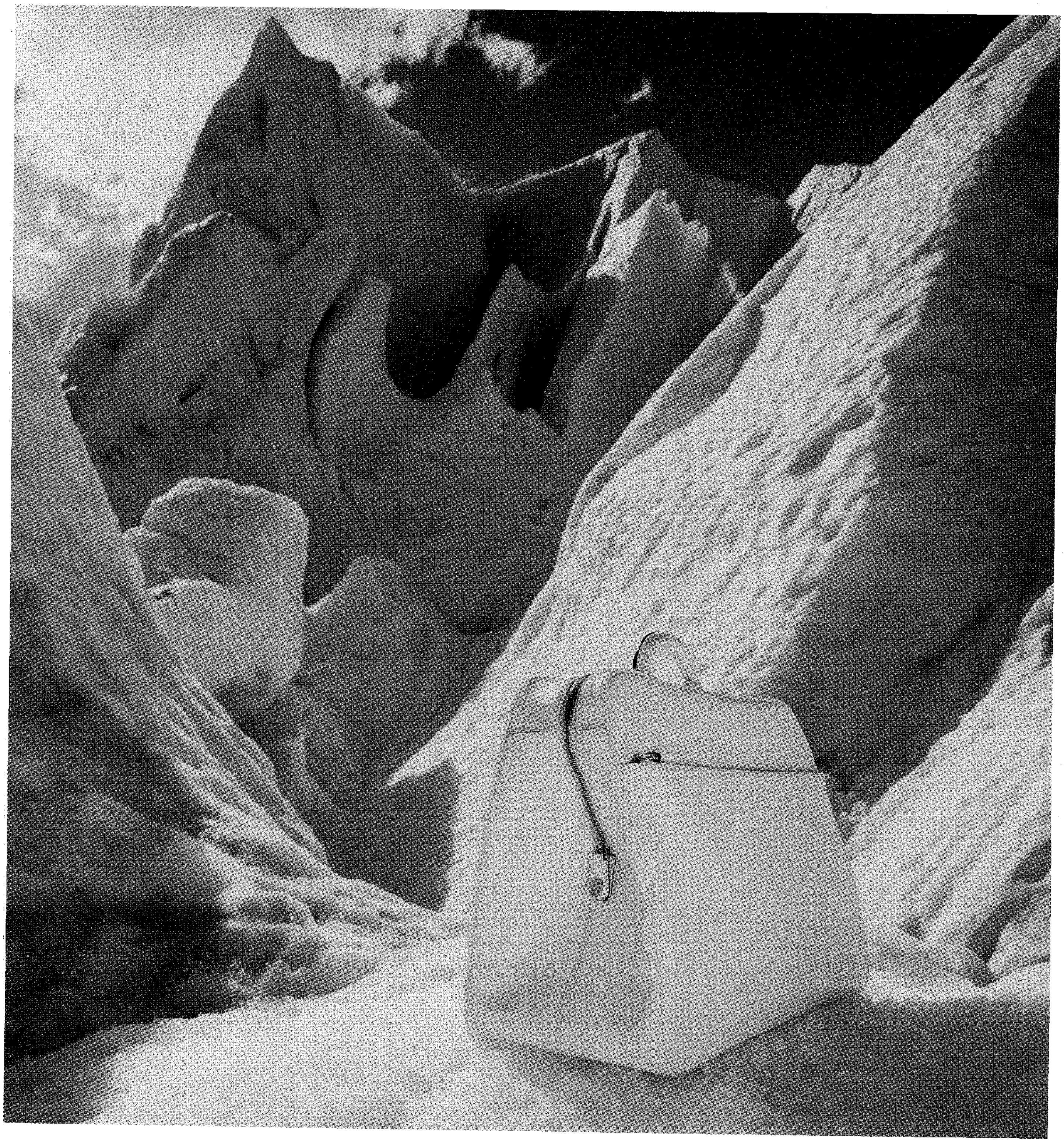
stocks everything, and the staff, I have found, is cordial and informed. I hate the place.

Gabriel Panek, aged fifteen, met me there in the pen aisle. "I like a pen that clicks and that I can chew on," he said. With those criteria foremost, he chose Bic Velocity colored pens ($5.99 for four). My pen of choice, by the way, is the black Pilot G-2 ($14.99 for a dozen), but it hurts a bit to shell out money for what once was to be my dowry. Gabriel also needed a few binders, because Miss Sugar, the Dalton School counsellor who advises students about their study habits, has recommended, controversially, that he switch from the universal binder system to the one-binder-per-subject system. In the binder section, Gabriel examined and then passed on a frosted plastic Dura-Tech three-ring ($5.29), which we agreed looked like a Tupperware container that you'd keep cold cuts in. "I used to care what kind of stuff I bought," Gabriel told me. "I was, like, 'Oooh, a Star Wars pen!' But now I think, It's cheap, get it."

"Once you're in around sixth grade and start to have a social life, you're not as interested in school supplies," Harrison Monsky, aged fifteen, said as he and his friends Alex Traub and Margot Vitale showed me around the spiffy-looking new Apple Store Fifth Avenue (767 Fifth Avenue, at 59th Street). "But school supplies were definitely training wheels for brand names," Alex said, explaining how their former love for Dr. Grip pens and Ph.D. pencils gave way to an enthusiasm for clothes from J. Crew, Lacoste, Diesel, Brooklyn Industries, and Triple Five Soul, as well as to electronics from Apple. "Apple owns us," Alex said, explaining that if you have a Windows PC instead of an Apple you have to make up an excuse to your friends—for example, that your school requires it.

It was Benjamin Franklin, I think, who said that no matter how much lip gloss you have at home, you need way, way more for school. Sephora, the international cosmetics chain, kindly provides an abundance of tester products for gaggles of girls who wish to make themselves look like drag queens after leaving the house but before arriving at, say, their friends' bas mitzvahs. I visited the branch at 2103 Broadway (73rd Street) with a thirteen-year-old friend, who used the gift card her grandmother had given her for the following: Urban Decay eyeshadow in "Smog," so that she can "do a smoky eye" ($15), and Sephora-brand nail polish in lavender with gold undertones, because "our uniform's boring, so you have to spice it up" ($4). On our way to the checkout counter, she studied a bottle of Clinique's Clarifying Lotion ($19), then put it down dismissively. "It's probably like scented candles. Not going to do anything. I mean, it's not like it's going to make me look twenty years younger."

What to wear to school in fifth grade? I found out by telephoning ten-year-old Lee Rostow Freedman, who was bursting with recommendations. "You should definitely wear black leggings," she told me. "They always go with miniskirts." Basic leggings are available at Target ($8.99) and lots of other places. Limited Too has them, also, and in more varieties (5301 King's Plaza, Brooklyn; $24.50, with lace hem or rhinestones). Lee said that the shoes to wear are still Uggs (Zappos.com; $84.95 to $143.95) or ballet flats (omnipresent). "I got a Longchamp bag, a nylon thing," she said (Longchamp, 713 Madison Avenue, at 63rd Street, and 132 Spring Street; $85 to $142). "But I think the purse kids want is Vera Bradley," she went on, referring to a shoulder bag in a bright-paisley quilted fabric that would please any Palm Beach socialite (Zitomer, 969 Madison Avenue, at 76th Street; approximately $50 to $60). "It's more of a preppie style. And you could wear a little velour jacket. Mini-jackets that are cut off are getting kind of in right now. You can go designer, but you can really get them anywhere." (All of these tips notwithstanding, Lee is wearing her school uniform, enlivened with some polka-dot hair ribbons.)



available at Barneys New York - Saks Fifth Avenue

Valextra

A word about labels. Tweens seem to be enthusiastic scholars in this department. Teen-agers, on the other hand, tend to be relatively indifferent to provenance (though little-known names can have cachet). To gauge a kid's brand-consciousness quotient (BCQ), I offer this equation:

$$BCQ=J\oint_x\left(\frac{\sqrt[3]{C_L}}{\frac{\pi}{2}B_L}\right)\left(ST_v^{\,3}+\log\left(F\right)\right)\prod_{n=1}^{\infty}\frac{R_nL_ve^{-iP}}{\pm\sin(H)}$$

Where the symbols have the following meanings:

BCQ = brand-consciousness quotient
J = # of jeans in closet, in hundreds
B_L = *distance from bedroom to second floor at Bloomingdale's, in blocks*
C_L = *closet space, in cubic miles*
S = # of shoes in closet that cost more than closet
T_V = *average # of quarrels per week with parents about purchases inspired by Teen Vogue*
F = # of links on Facebook page to personal shoppers
H = hours spent getting dressed for school
R = hours per night spent watching "Project Runway" reruns
L_V = *# of tattoos that duplicate Louis Vuitton logos*
P = # of pets in house named Abercrombie, Fitch, or Hilfiger

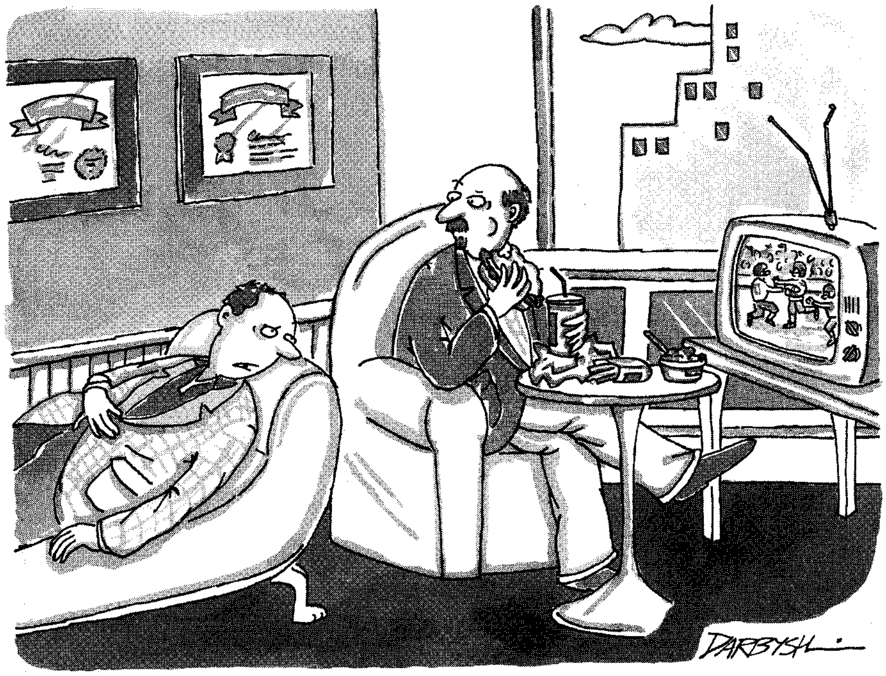
Note: This formula cannot be computed without either the Texas Instruments TI-83 or the TI-84 Plus Graphing Calculators (Staples; $84.96 and $104.99, respectively).

"Back to school is incredibly stressful," sixteen-year-old Eliza Martin told me as we flipped through a bin of CDs at Sound Fix, an independent record store in Williamsburg (110 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn). "You have to be up on the new music and movies and current events."

We walked down the block to Beacon's Closet (88 North Eleventh Street) and browsed the racks of vintage clothes, organized by color. "You play it cool the first five days of school and wear something bland," Eliza said. "Then you break out your outrageous stuff. Maybe two or three weeks after school starts, you get a haircut—choppy rock and roll is in—so people can see the transformation. That's my technique, anyway." From the white rack, Eliza tried on a bedraggled chintz vest adorned with black rickrack. "The more stains, the better," she said. The vest was eleven dollars. "With my friends, it's pretty much a race to be the cheapest. For instance, you'd never admit to buying a pair of sunglasses for more than ten dollars—but, of course, I do spend that, and sometimes even more."

Who pays for all this stuff, anyway? "Most kids I know are proud of the fact that they pay for their own clothes," Eliza said. She gets sixty dollars a week in allowance, which is supposed to cover all her expenses, including transportation, food, and entertainment; she knows kids who get as much as two hundred dollars a week. Gabriel Panek, in contrast, gets six dollars, but is heavily subsidized by his parents.

I will not be taking advanced biochemistry this semester, but I was put into the back-to-school spirit one night recently, hanging out in the punk-rock boutiques on St. Mark's Place with Owen Kline, a fifteen-year-old actor. He had on skinny straight black jeans, a baggy shirt, and a bandanna that he'd fashioned into a headband, and he looked as cool as you can look if you wear braces. At Trash and Vaudeville (4 St. Mark's Place), a shop frequented thirty years ago by Debbie Harry, Joey Ramone, and Alice Cooper—and now, a few times a week, by Owen—the buyer, Jimmy Webb, who was covered in tattoos and sheathed in skintight pants made of tiger-striped fabric he called "hooker's underwear," talked me into buying a pair of Jimmy jeans ($52, by Tripp NYC). "We sell hundreds of these a week to the kids," he said, observing that the close fit made them "cup of soup apparel," not "plate of spaghetti apparel." A few doors down the block, at East Village Shoe Repair (1 St. Mark's Place), which sells used sneakers (between you and me: ick), Owen acquired a pair of blue Reeboks ($10) from the eighties, although he worried that the retro look might be too in with kids his age. His final purchases, from a hole-in-the-wall joint, were enormous black glasses with nonprescription lenses ($4) and a white bandanna ($2), the only color bandanna he didn't already have, with the exception of plum, which he said he just can't do. "My plan is to be known as the kid at school who wears the bandanna—the Bandanna Kid," he told me. "I'm going to pick a bandanna at random every morning, and not care if it matches what I'm wearing." Then Owen's mother called on his cell phone.



"Shouldn't you be writing some of this down?"

When I went to college, I took an Olivetti typewriter, courtesy of Marx Office Products, and a single duffel bag of stuff, which included some underpants my mother had sewn nametags on for the occasion. I guess we thought I was going to sleepaway

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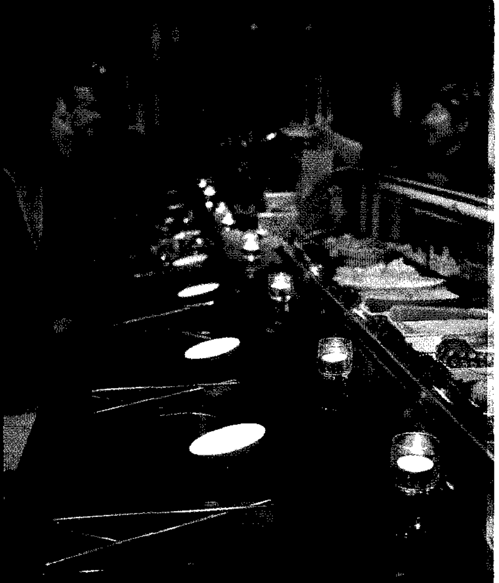
Be indulged.



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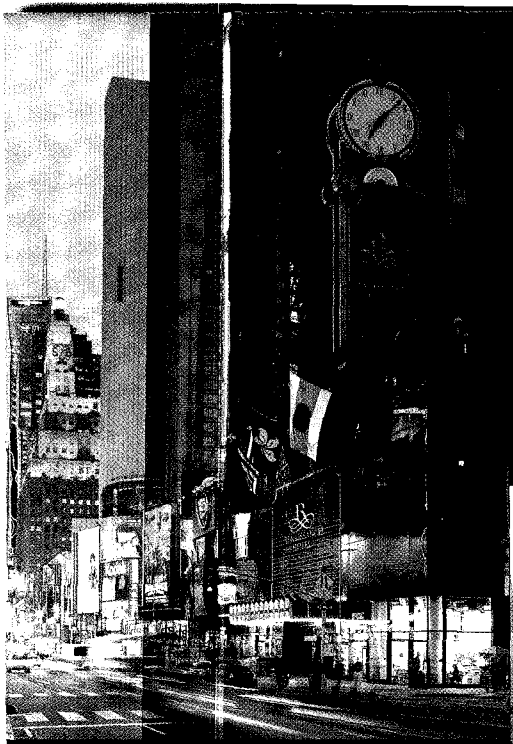

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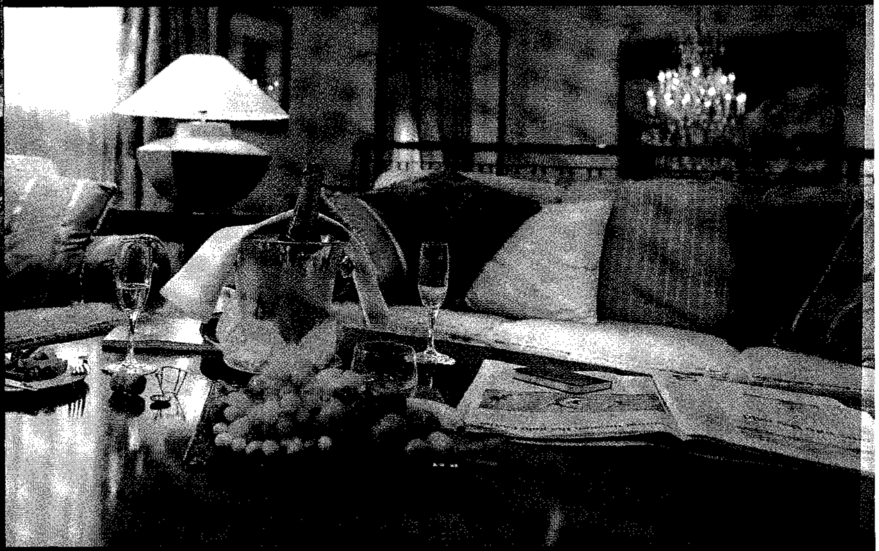

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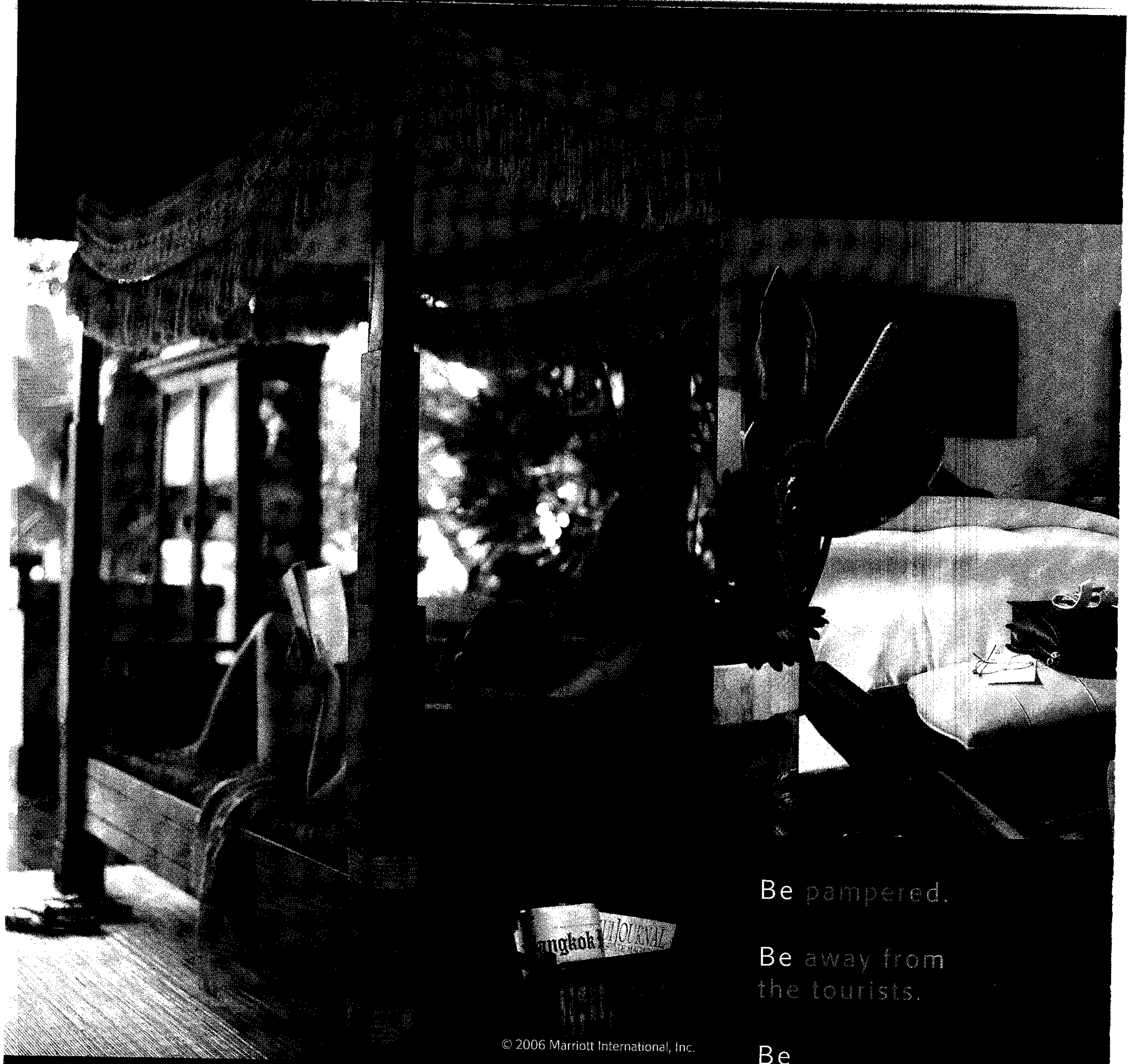

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camp. Now many colleges send incoming freshmen long inventories of what to bring (for instance, extra-long sheets to fit a dormitory bed, which, for some reason unknown to me, is five inches longer than normal) and also what not to bring (pretty much anything that heats up; for example, popcorn poppers, toasters, halogen lights, firearms).

Besides piles of clothes, this is some of what Kate Radlauer, a freshman at Connecticut College, told me she'd brought: "Towels, tons of hangers, garbage cans, two huge bottles of Pantene shampoo, eye-makeup-removing wipes, a shower caddy, laundry bags, laundry detergent, little stain-removing pens because I don't want to do the laundry often, a place setting, a sewing kit that my mom forced on me, and I'm upset about it, a stapler, a hole punch, some scissors, a TV I bought online and a computer I bought online, a huge first-aid kit—I thought it'd be a good thing in case someone has an injury and they don't want to go to the infirmary—extra-long sheets (this is actually annoying, because I later found out that Bed Bath & Beyond makes them and they're much nicer than the stuff I got at the place recommended in my college information packet), drawers for under the bed, risers that raise the bed so you can fit stuff under it, and a flashlight, I don't know why."

Two stores in particular furnish most of this plenitude: Bed Bath & Beyond (kids especially go for the Beyond; 620 Sixth Avenue, at 18th Street, and other locations) and the Container Store (725 Lexington Avenue, at 58th Street, and 629 Sixth Avenue, at 18th Street), where I shopped with Julia Hornig a few days before her parents drove her to Harvard. The Container Store has towering ceilings and sleek white walls, making you feel as if you were in—well, a container. Shoppers can help themselves to a brochure advising what to take to college, which includes the question "What's your dorm-room organization style?" Everywhere in the store, there seemed to be girls throwing God-knows-what into their oversized shopping carts and mothers saying, "Do you really need that?"

Julia and I pushed our cart past shelves of three-drawer file cabinets with locks ($199). "Like, whoa! Locks?" Julia said. "I study, I'm organized, but do I want file cabinets that say school is my whole life? No, I don't." We walked down another aisle, coming upon columns of Calypso rectangular boxes in hot pink, aqua blue, kiwi, and white ($7.99 each). "Don't get boxes that stack, because you're always going to want to get into the one on the bottom," Julia told me as if I and not she were college-bound. "Get drawers," she said with authority (large Calypso drawers, $8.99 each; small, $7.99). Around the bend, there were still more boxes in still more colors. "The myth of the Container Store is that there are a lot of options," Julia observed. "Really, they have a few things with some modifications, but in vast quantities and in a lot of different colors—a rainbow of colors—which makes it look exciting. If you get just one color, though, it's not the same. Nobody can get just some of the rainbow! And a whole rainbow costs a lot."

In the laundry section, we saw a woman chuck a large canvas contraption into her daughter's cart. "So you can put your darks in one bin and your lights in another!" she said, gung ho.

"What's the point?" the daughter said, looking bewildered.

"So when you do your laundry—"

"Mom, you really think I'm going to do my laundry?" she said, and reached for a Mighty Magnetic Strip bulletin board ($12.99), which Julia informed me is a must-have.

To go with her Flower Power Notice Board ($24), a corkboard shaped like a daisy, Julia picked up a package of metallic pushpins shaped like men ($6.99 for twenty-four), then studied the little stick figures and returned the package to the shelf, declaring the potential purchase immature. "The dilemma about shopping for college is that you're buying stuff to represent yourself to people who don't know who you are," she said, "but you don't know who you are yet, either, or who you want to be." At the checkout counter, Julia bought a giant pill vial that was shaped like a Prozac capsule ($6.99).

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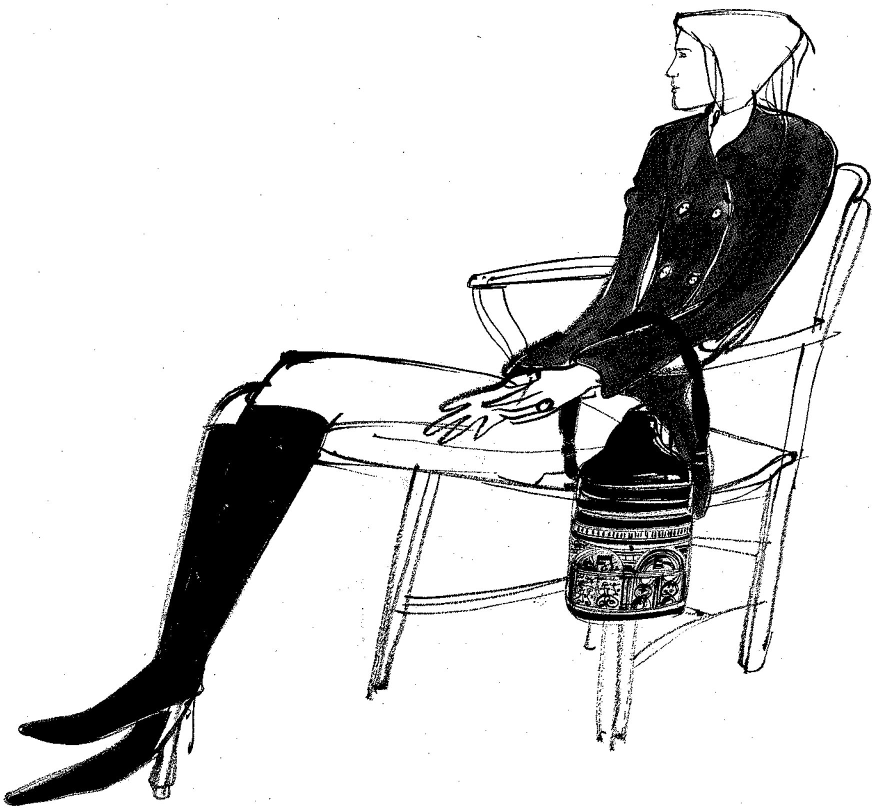
BAG LADY

How Silvia Fendi Venturini started the handbag boom.

BY ANDREA LEE

I had a handbag epiphany recently at a literary luncheon in Milan. The occasion was a book launch for Isabel Allende, at a grand apartment behind La Scala, and the high-ceilinged rooms lined with paintings were crammed with writers, a few Italian senators, and a countess. The largely feminine company being the kind of leftist intellectuals who don't dress up, there was little flamboyance in attire, but a glance at one of the couches in the *salotto* told a different story. Parked there were five enormous crocodile handbags of the latest designer styles—bags as large as Christmas turkeys, groomed and bedizened, glistening and scaly as pet dragons, exuding, in their reptilian complacency, a subtle air of menace. More than a hundred thousand dollars' worth of bag, lined up like Porsches outside a night club.

The sight reminded me that for the past several years we have been living in a gilded age of handbags: a rococo time of profligacy, opulence, heights of stylistic genius and depths of vulgarity, but, above all, a time of exponential proliferation and vitality. Since the turn of the millennium, the role of the handbag has changed from that of a useful but peripheral accessory to the absolute object of desire. Last winter, an English journalist describing London Fashion Week wrote, "Everybody—everybody—is talking about handbags with the intensity of cardinals appointing a new Pope." If each fashion generation has its defining silhouette—the elongated lily shapes of Poiret in the early nineteen hundreds; the shoulder-padded forties and eighties; the full-skirted New Look of the fifties—then the silhouette of the first years of the twenty-first century is sleek and long and linear, with volume added not by a bustle or a big hat but by an enormous, bulging bag.



Venturini hopes to continue her run of hits with the bucket-shaped Palazzo bag.

Designer bags now regularly cost a month's rent. They've spawned their own jargon, from "It bag" and "arm candy" (both already passé) to the current "stealth bag"—an expensive purse made by a lesser-known artisan. Open any fashion magazine and you find pages of bag porn, seductively arranged and carefully lit pocketbooks in close-up, overshadowing any accompanying models. In paparazzi shots, celebrities totter under the weight of the latest limited-edition bags like knights displaying their emblems.

Silvia Fendi Venturini is a small, rather shy Roman woman with heavy-lidded eyes and a feline smile that deepens subtly whenever she talks about hammered calf and visible stitching and Plexiglas buckles. Venturini designs accessories and menswear for Fendi, S.R.L., the Roman fashion house founded as a leather-goods company back in 1925 by her grandparents Edoardo and Adele Fendi, and brought onto the international stage in the nineteen-sixties and seventies by the five Fendi daughters—Paola, Anna, Franca, Carla, and Alda. Now Venturini, who is Anna's daughter, is the only Fendi family member who designs for the company, which, since 2001, has been part of Bernard Arnault's LVMH luxury-goods empire. She is revered in the industry as the creator of such cult handbags as the Spy, the Ostrik, and last season's B. Fendi. But mostly she is known as the author of the Fendi Baguette, the bag that in the late nineties changed the pocketbook landscape. The Baguette is an oblong bag about the size of a folded newspaper, with a Fendi logo clasp and a short handle, designed to allow the bag to nestle closely under the arm the way Frenchmen (in cartoons, at least) clasp their loaves of daily bread. Like a Petrarchan sonnet, the Baguette form is always the same, but within it the variations are unending: it has appeared in everything from denim to feathers to gemstones. When a mugger demanded Carrie Bradshaw's bag in an episode of "Sex and the City," she corrected him: "It's a Baguette."

The evolution went like this: Back in

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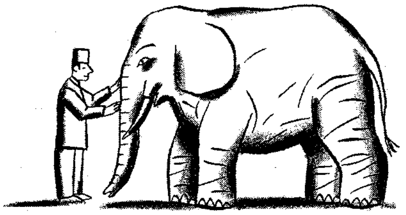
the eighties, as the bull market was inciting a new era of flashiness, handbags remained strangely timid and restrained. A fashion neophyte, I was acquiring my first designer bags and dreaming of others, and such dreams were simple: one wanted a Kelly or a quilted Chanel, or a bamboo-handled Gucci or something sparkly by Judith Leiber. These bags were certainly expensive, but they were understood to be investments and still carried a matronly aura of rich aunts and bourgeois mothers—they weren't fashionable, not objects of impulse and lust. Then, in the nineties, luxury conglomerates started buying up venerable brands, and Miuccia Prada transformed a boring upper-middle-class Milanese label into a postmodern kingdom, presenting, along the way, a pricy minimalist backpack in black parachute nylon. Young women and their mothers both wanted this bag, which was practical, modest, and eminently cool, and yet it semaphored money—one of the first bags outside the old classics that you could find counterfeited in Hong Kong.

In 1997, Silvia Venturini brought out the Baguette, and it changed the market irrevocably. The Baguette was that rare object that answered perfectly to the spirit of the times, which was a mass hunger for ostentatious display, and also a desire for frivolous treats for women who worked hard at having it all. The Baguette, with its differently colored and elaborately decorated variations, made stylish women dream, like kids with Pokémon cards, of collecting the whole set. Baguettes sold so quickly—a hundred thousand in the first year—that the Fendi workshops in Tuscany could not keep up with the demand. Waiting lists became a fundamental part of status-bag culture. They gave upper-middle-class women the sense of being part of an inner circle of bespoke fashion. To date, Fendi has sold about six hundred thousand Baguettes (average cost: $1,500), and still brings out thirty or forty different versions every year. The Baguette phenomenon presented new economic opportunities for rival fashion houses, who rushed to pick up on the trend. And so, in a flurry of attention-getting signature bags with cute names, began the twenty-first-century bag wars, the rush of inventiveness and profit that added to the dramatic revival of houses like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Christian Dior. (In 2005, leather goods accounted for fifty-four per cent of Gucci's revenues.) In a casual genealogy of turn-of-the-millennium handbags, it could be said that the Baguette begat the Prada bowling bag, the reborn Jackie bag by Gucci, the Saint Laurent Mombasa, the Murakami Louis Vuitton, the Dior Detective, and scores of other bags women all wanted, and bought.

"C*'è stata un'overdose di borse*"—"There has been a bit of a bag overdose"—Venturini said, one afternoon earlier this year, sitting at her big white worktable upstairs in the nineteenth-century Roman palazzo that is the new Fendi headquarters. "It's quite funny. Everyone thought to copy the Baguette, and now everybody thinks you can support a company with accessories, especially handbags." She had on a gray dress with a brown shahtoosh around her neck, her round face pale and tense, her blond hair pulled back. Venturini doesn't seem to concern herself with the competition. After the Baguette, she produced a series of hit bags, most notably the Spy, with its poufy turban shape and hidden change and lipstick compartments, and the B. Fendi, which looks to become a design classic, with its large sculpted buckles and ladylike handles. That day, she was in the throes of creating a new handbag, hoping to continue her run of hits.

"For the moment, we're calling it the Palazzo bag," she said, gesturing at a brown leather object before her. It looked like a bucket, the size of a child's beach pail, round on the bottom and with a soft drawstring leather top. It was a prototype, the first mockup, a working model of a bag that first existed in Venturini's head, then as a sketch on a computer screen, and then as a paper pattern. An artisan in Fendi's workshop near Florence crafted it by hand. "Perhaps we'll come up with another name when we get right up to the collections in Milan—that's when we are more relaxed and discover the real character, the identity of a handbag." She laughed. "Now there is no time to think about names. Now there is a lot of pressure. A really crazy moment."



On this particular afternoon, the *piano nobile* of the palazzo was full of buyers and managers from the worldwide network of a hundred and twenty-five Fendi shops, visiting Rome to preview the fall collections. The first two floors house the company's flagship store, the executive offices are on three, and the top two floors contain the airy design studios. (Karl Lagerfeld, who designs Fendi's women's prêt-à-porter and its furs, sweeps in often, like a black-winged angel.) Throughout, there's a feeling that Italians call *sopra la bottega*—the family atmosphere in a place where everybody is crowded together above the shop and working to make it a success.

The past two years have been good to the company. It has emerged from the turbulence surrounding its four-year transition from a family-owned firm to an LVMH subsidiary. In spite of the success of Venturini's accessories, the company had overextended itself by quickly opening more than a hundred shops during the post-Baguette years. Squabbles within the Fendi clan—the five sisters and their families added up to about thirty shareholders, which in 1999 agreed to sell a fifty-one-per-cent stake to LVMH's joint venture with Prada—added to the muddle. The company had no central headquarters, working conditions were poor, and Fendi risked losing Lagerfeld, who reportedly didn't get along with Prada's C.E.O., Patrizio Bertelli. The turnaround began in 2004, when Arnault bought out the remaining Fendi and Prada shares, and set about revamping his billion-dollar investment, restructuring the retail network, opening a palatial Manhattan store designed by Peter Marino, and creating a symbolic hub for the company by transforming the Palazzo Boncompagni Ludovisi into the Palazzo Fendi. Guiding the process was Michael Burke, Fendi's new C.E.O. and a onetime LVMH manager, who had helped reinvent Dior

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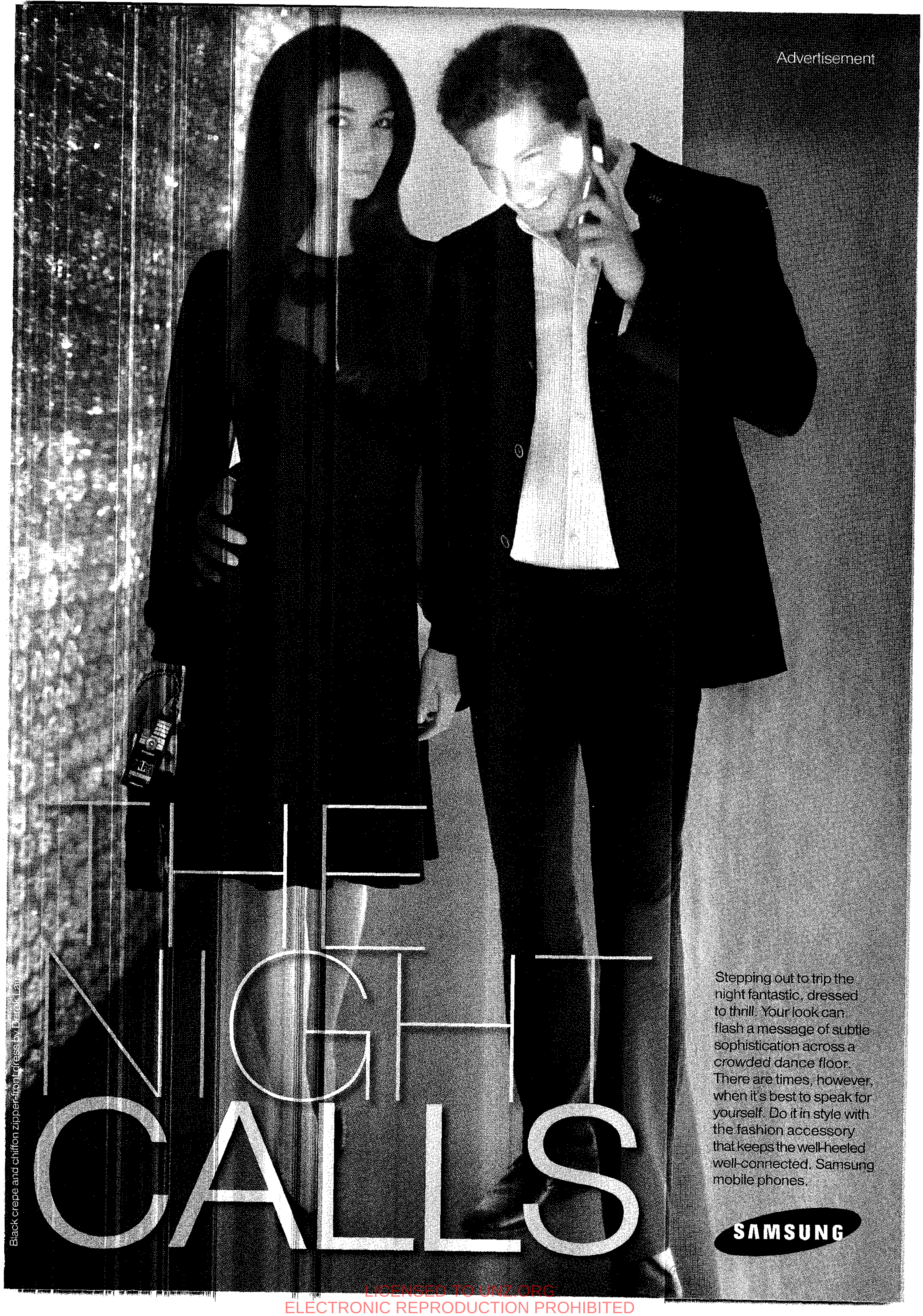

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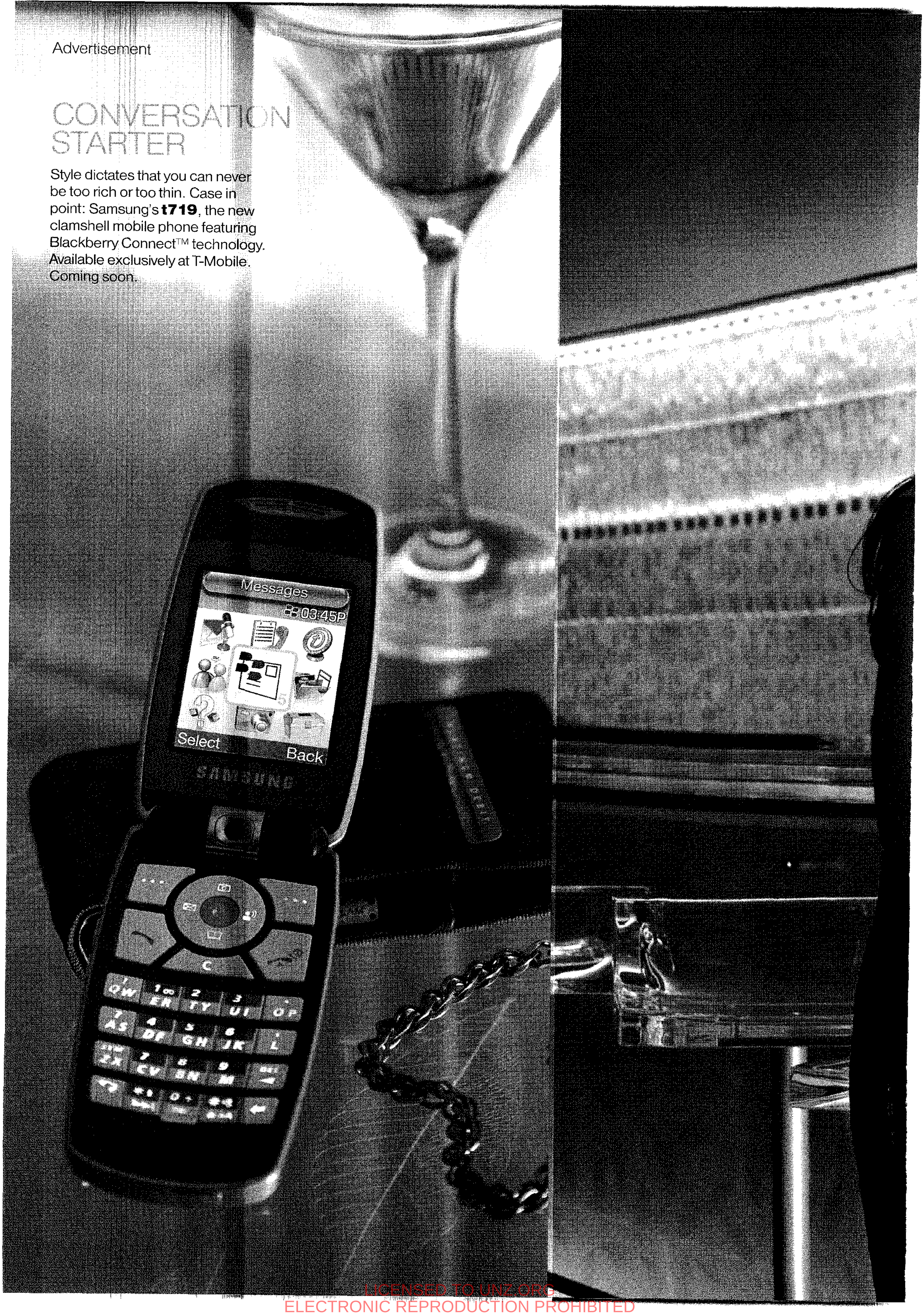
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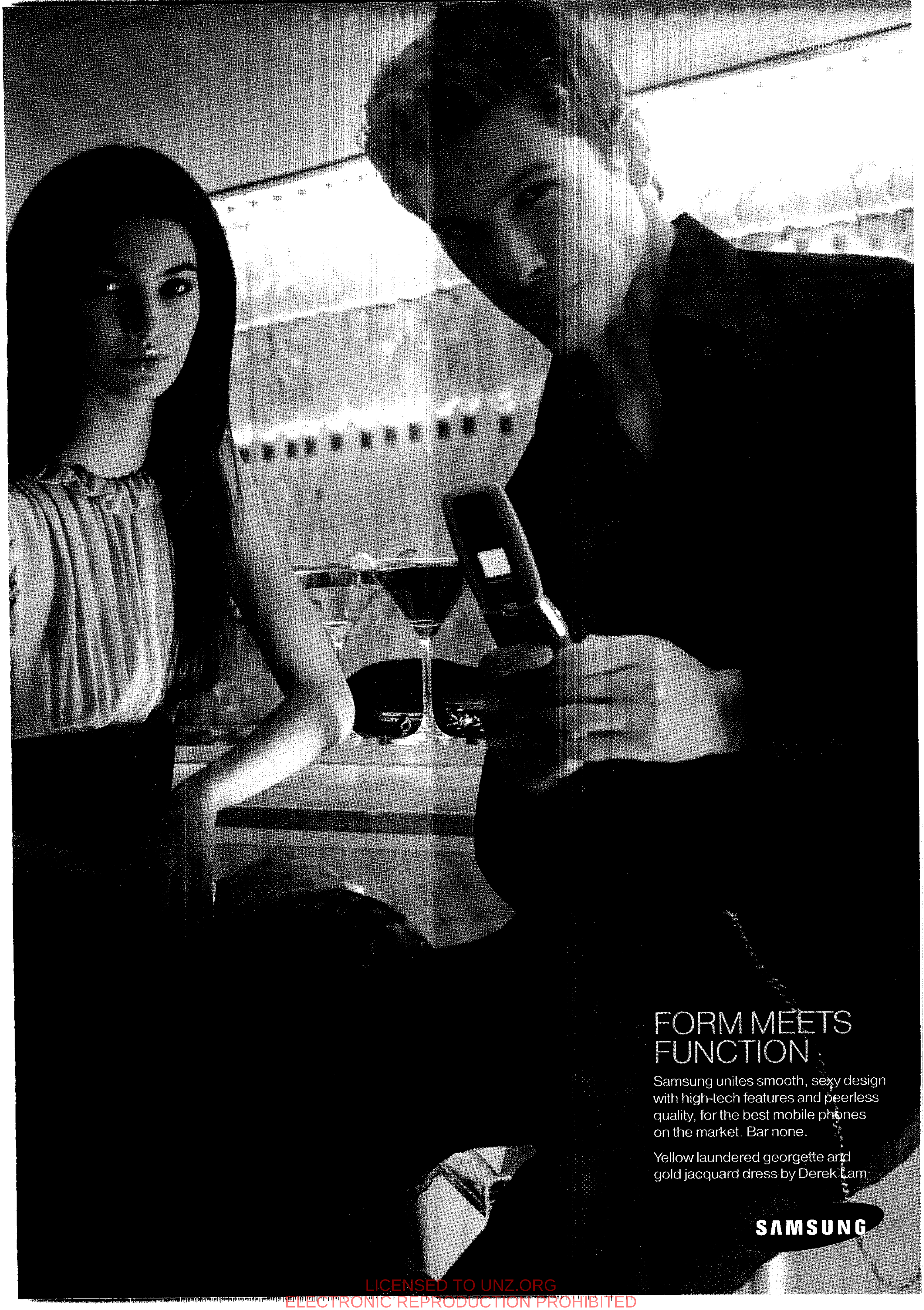

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with the designer John Galliano. It was Burke, an intense, soft-spoken man, half American, half French, who kept Lagerfeld in the fold. Now Venturini and Lagerfeld share the same enormous desk in the loftlike studio.

"Nothing big works if you want success in Italy," Burke told me as he led me around the palazzo. "In this country, even if you're big you have to keep the mind-set of a small company, working in *fiducia totale*—total faith." He went on, "It's like we're in the kitchen with all the cooks, with flour on the floor."

Upstairs in the atelier, designers and assistants who had just finished with the menswear show were preparing for the prêt-à-porter, but the center of all the energy seemed to be the homely brown prototype bag. It reminded me of a Moroccan leather bag I had in ninth grade that smelled strongly of camel. This bag, which Venturini handled with tender protectiveness, like a mother with a backward child, was to be the future face of Fendi. It would make its début on the runway at the fall-winter prêt-à-porter show in Milan, accompanying clothes designed by Lagerfeld. Venturini noticed my skeptical expression and smiled. "This is just the first prototype," she said. "Probably you won't recognize it in the end."

She said that she had been thinking for a long time about doing a bucket bag, a style that Fendi last did in the sixties. "When I saw Karl's first drawings of the winter 2006 collection, where everything is rounded, and is about volume, I thought it would be nice to do a bag that also gives the effect of volume."

A bucket, she said, is a hard bag to do. "A round bag takes a lot of space," she said, holding the prototype awkwardly under her arm. "From a practical point of view, it should be soft, so first we did it soft. But now I'm interested in hard leather, and so I want to see if we can at the same time make it rigid. We don't like to do things the easy way." She called across the room to one of her design assistants, Marco De Vincenzo, a young man with a faun's face and a mass of curly dark hair, wearing huge rapper jeans and a striped pullover. He approached holding a swatch of thick caramel-colored hammered leather embossed with a repeating architectural design. He spoke quickly to Venturini: "About those pockets. You said thirteen centimetres, but on a bag of this size, eleven really does better."

"*Va bene*, do eleven," she said. "Now, the Plexiglas handles." She picked up a chain made of fat black plastic links. "This is too smooth. I want each link—"

"Faceted," De Vincenzo finished for her. "And the coins—"

"Janus-head and squirrel pattern. Check the Baguette with the coins to get the sizes."

The next step in the design process would be to figure out many variations of the Palazzo bag. Then would come the ordering of colored leathers and design components—studs and handles and other decorations—from suppliers in Tuscany and Lombardy. Further mockups in different leathers would be created by the Fendi artisans. Then, with a design team that includes De Vincenzo and Cristiana Torre, the head of accessories, a decision would be made about the final design. Only then would the artisans near Florence begin to produce the bags, about a hundred different models. From these, Venturini and Lagerfeld would select the dozen that would accompany his clothes down the catwalk.

"In Florence, we sit around the table at the factory with the second or third prototypes and all the ornaments and we get to work. Often we fight." Venturini went on, "Then in Milan it's always a very exciting time when the bags arrive from Florence. Some are beautiful, and some which we thought would be beautiful are a big disappointment. There are always surprises, like at Christmas."

The prototype is called the Palazzo for a reason: showing a knack for brand consolidation, Venturini modelled it on the Palazzo Fendi itself, with its neoclassical pilasters and arched windows. "Of course, this is just a try—we're not happy with the quality yet. The idea is to do something very baroque and dramatic. We want to work with this idea of non-embroidery to give a three-dimensional look—using other elements like very light metal studs shaped like little towers and pillars and doors. Then we are going to add little bricks, some

• •

made of leather, some metal, so it will be"—Venturini laughed and suddenly looked like a small girl—"it will be like building a little house."

Venturini grew up in the family business, her childhood in the nineteen-sixties paralleling the rise of Fendi from a local firm to a company with an international reputation. "My best times were spent doing my homework hanging around the shop, watching my mother and my aunts at work," she said. "When I was twelve, they finally let me work as an assistant package-wrapper." She continued, "The atelier was always a bit of a salon—famous actors and artists would drop by. Fellini would come. I met Karl there when I was four years old." There is a picture that shows Venturini at around five years old, wearing a tiny fur coat designed by Lagerfeld.

"Karl sends me books and books, for inspiration," she said, indicating a stack of volumes on the table, including a thick book about eighteenth-century French inlay woodwork, and another dedicated to the baroque wall paintings of the Aimo family, a dynasty of Piedmontese mural artists. The Aimo book has an inscription in Lagerfeld's black slashing script: "*Ce livre est une source inépuisable de grafisme, de broderie et d'arabesques.*"

Another source of inspiration is the Fendi archive, a warehouse on the outskirts of Rome with nearly every Fendi bag made in the past eighty years stored in temperature-controlled vaults. "I carry them," Venturini said. "I like them when they get old and worn. If I can't find something in the archive, my mother will have it, or one of my aunts."

For a brief period in her twenties, Venturini left the company: she headed off to Los Angeles, where she met and married a French jeweller. Before divorcing, in 1994, the couple divided their time between Brazil and Italy and had two children together. "I tried to run away, " she said. "I knew that it was a *lavoro totale*, a totally involving job. But I came back in 1984, when my first child was about to be born. Back to the family, back to the business."

I met up with Venturini and her team two weeks later at the Fendi workshops at Bagno a Ripoli, outside Florence, after the artisans had completed the next incarnation of the Palazzo bag. While I waited, I found myself thinking a lot about handbags.

I remembered a family story: that the reason my father's nose was particularly flat was that in 1915, when he was three years old, he was standing by his mother's elbow when her swinging metal-mesh handbag accidentally smashed him in the face. Could that be why I have always regarded handbags as objects of mysterious potency?

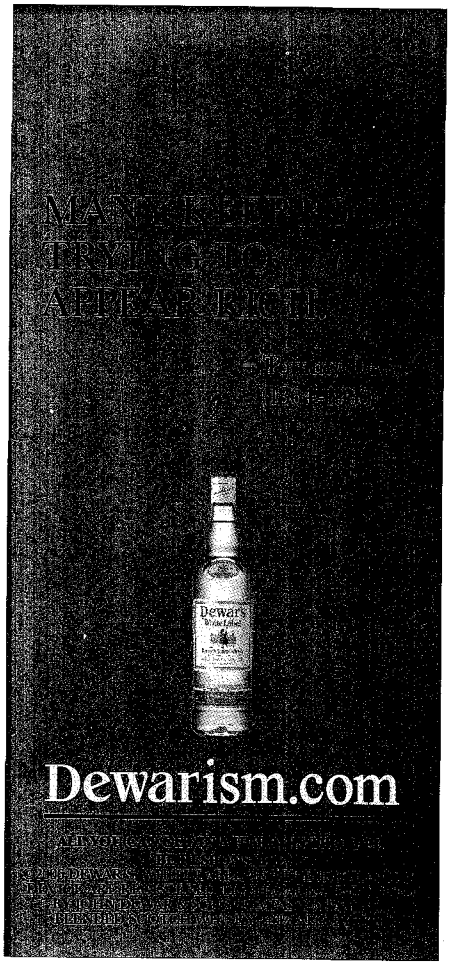
An artist friend once told me about a nouveau-riche Russian client who came to her studio to look at paintings. The client was very haughty, and she clutched, high in her arms, like a shield, an enormous bag covered with buckles and chains. As the woman looked at the paintings, she let the bag drop lower and lower; then, finally, with tears in her eyes, she put it on the floor. "It was like she'd stripped naked," my friend said.

Designer bags and their increasing cost seem to arouse a universal hostility in men. (Even gay men don't care much about handbags.) Freud interpreted them as—yuck—female genitalia, but they are really more like households or dowries, signs of possession and responsibility and flaunted power which we women—always foragers—carry around with us and display to each other.

I thought about my first Kelly bag, presented to me a long time ago by a Japanese business associate of my husband's. With a flourish, he put the orange box in my hands, and my husband looked on in a jealous rage. Soon afterward my husband found an excuse to ban the exchange of gifts with clients.

"*Non le finiremo mai!*"—"We'll never get them all done!"—De Vincenzo shouted, waving a list of several dozen variations of the Palazzo that were expected to be made by the end of the week. "Did you see the plans on the computer? The way they mixed them up, it looks like a video game!"

Venturini shot him a mollifying look. They were sitting at a round table upstairs in the complex at Bagno a Ripoli, with Cristiana Torre and the managers of the facility. On the wall, the five Fendi sisters, all with feathered



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"Charlie's Angels" hairdos, stared intensely from a photograph. Outside a large window, the winter sun shone down on a suburban-industrial landscape of small factories divided by cypresses, stucco apartment houses, and, in the background, past a state highway, brown Tuscan hills dotted with farmhouses.

Venturini, wearing jeans and a jacket with a stretched-out black scarf, looked wearier and grumpier than she did in Rome, as did the rest of the staff, who smoked frantically as they gloomily stared at the center of table. There sat the Palazzo bag—four of them, one in black patent leather with the architectural design embossed in gold; one in midnight blue with black trim; one whose sides were covered with studded metal, like a modern mace; and one in the dark-brown shade known as *testa di moro* (Moor's head). Surrounded by the usual heap of accessories—studs, buckles, chain links—the bags looked both soft and rigid, as Venturini had described, tidied-up and gleaming versions of the humble brown prototype. But the team looked at them as if they were dull schoolboys who had failed an examination. In the next three days, they had to come up with a hundred variations on the theme.

The effectiveness of a handbag design, it was becoming clear, turns on its versatility: you have to create a shape striking enough to hold its own when rendered in a wide variety of colors and textures and sizes. (Back in Rome, I had heard Venturini talk about making a version of the Palazzo for evening, approximately the dimensions of a takeout-coffee cup.) Fendi has released between seven hundred and eight hundred versions of the Baguette, and each is recognizable by its silhouette alone.

I stopped in at the Fendi warehouse and cutting rooms in a big pastel building nearby that houses a trove of leathers. They arrive from tanning plants that have been operating in the nearby town of Santa Croce sull'Arno since the eighteen-hundreds. The facility's director, a man with a ruddy face, showed me leathers in all colors and finishes, thick and thin; lamb and calf and pigskin; snake and crocodile and ostrich; fish and eelskin. I watched as a cutter in a blue coverall used a scalpel to cut an American alligator hide tinted a pale pink, and saw how much skin would have to be discarded so that the markings on the bag would be uniform. The director pulled out rare skins destined for one-of-a-kind custom-made bags: immense pythons with the design of each scale thrown into relief by subtle hand-painting; a lizard with a laserlike iridescence; the creamy white hide of ostrich legs, used only for bag handles.

The *laboratorio*, where the cut skins are sewn into bags and decorated, is a brightly lit space full of worktables and computers, where about forty workers were hand- or machine-stitching,

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hammering, and gluing. One table was heaped with tiny gold lamé B. Fendi evening purses, to be given to celebrities in time for the Academy Awards. Second and third prototypes of the Palazzo stood on some tables.

The ornateness of these bags contrasted strangely with the austere atmosphere of the room, where technicians labored in a concentrated silence worthy of a monastery scriptorium. The question of whether skilled workers like these, who earn about twenty-five dollars an hour, can compete with the expanding ranks of Chinese workers, who earn perhaps a dollar an hour, is a question that must keep Michael Burke, the C.E.O., not to mention many an Italian politician, awake at night.

Back in the meeting room, Venturini picked up the *testa di moro* prototype to show me something I hadn't noticed before. This particular version had tiny leather doors that actually opened to show miniature hand-painted sepia-toned scenes of Rome. "We tried printed scenes, but it looked too cheap, a little kitschy," she said. "This is getting close to how I want it. And I'd like to add little locks on the doors."

I remarked that the multiple layers of leather required for this model made it look a little on the heavy side. She gave me the kind of look that Julian Schnabel might give someone who asked about the practicality of serving dinner on the plates in his paintings. "These ornate versions are more...objects," she said. "We don't care if it is heavy or not—if it's beautiful."

The first drama connected with Fendi's fall-winter prêt-à-porter show was that Bernard Arnault, the C.E.O. of LVMH, who had never attended a Fendi show, announced that he was coming. There was a sense among the staff that Arnault was ready to see some return on his company's billion-dollar investment. Michael Burke said that his boss was like a man with a cellar full of rare vintages, each one with its own flavor and timetable, and that he sensed when one fashion house was ready to pop.

The second drama occurred at the show itself, when the photographers' platform collapsed, resulting in pandemonium: shrieks and swearing from the dozens of photographers who were thrown off balance. Most of the photographers walked out, to protest the unsafe working conditions. Arnault and Anna Wintour and Carine Roitfeld and other members of the audience heroically resisted the temptation to stand up and stare at the ruckus in the so-called pigpen at the far end of the runway. (The Italian fashion editor Anna Piaggi, birdlike in high heels and a feather-duster hat, climbed up on a chair to peer at the confusion.) The show began, underphotographed, forty minutes late.

Lagerfeld's clothes featured a lot of gray flannel, suggestions of kimonos, bustiers, and, of course, the finished Palazzo bags. About ten of them appeared, including one in black patent leather and the version covered in metal studs like a medieval weapon; Venturini had interspersed them with ornate versions of the B. Fendi. The audience was enthusiastic. Suzy Menkes, in her review the next day, called the bags "strong, even overwhelming."

Backstage after the show, I worked my way through the mob to where Lagerfeld was standing, a tall black-clad beacon. Smiling his faintly savage smile, his silvery neoclassical bouffant in place, he is clearly unshaken by the whims of tycoons or the tantrums of photographers. "Another one of Silvia's dreams in leather," he said of the bags. "She was a unique child—she had an instinctive passion for the *materia prima*, for luxury."

As she greeted well-wishers, Venturini had on a black dress with a pair of vertiginous pumps that made her look more than ever like a child playing dress-up. But her face was transformed: pink-cheeked, radiant, the way women in movies look when they've just given birth. She laughed and introduced me to her daughter, Delfina, a pretty curly-haired eighteen-year-old. "Can you believe it?" she said of the show. "When a little while ago there was nothing at all!"

She spoke of taking a trip to visit some old friends in Brazil. "But now I have to take care of the spring menswear," she added. "And, of course, with the accessories, there's something else I'm thinking up."

As her mother spoke, Delfina squeezed her arm. "*La mia mamma*," she said. "My mother always has another bag in mind."

De Vincenzo, wearing a polyester shirt and his usual gigantic jeans, appeared, clutching a bottle of champagne. He told me that most of the bags had arrived just the day before. "There were so many of them!" he said, as if talking about a bumper crop of peaches. "Big ones, little ones—we had to choose in a hurry." Cristiana Torre, the accessories director, looked pleased, but in a more businesslike way. "It looks very good," she said. "But tomorrow we begin taking orders, and then we'll really see what this little purse can do." ♦

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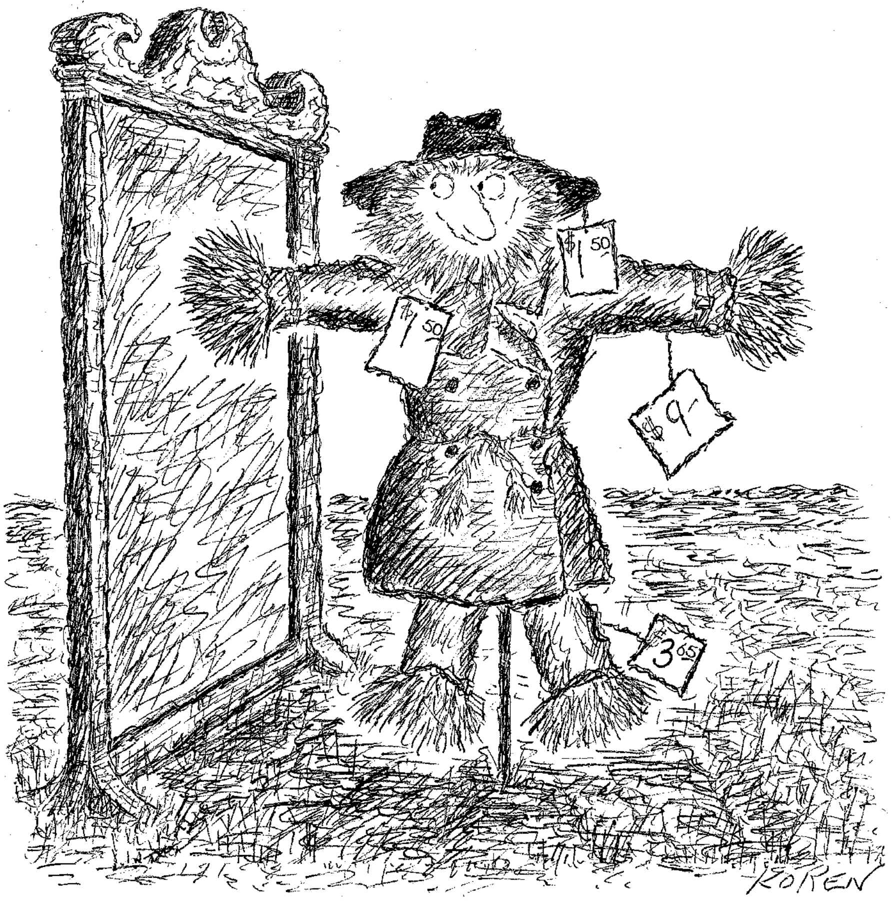
LETTER FROM NOVA SCOTIA

RAG TIME

What I bought last summer.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

I'll admit that I lost interest in Frenchy's for a number of years, once we got the scarecrow outfitted. In 1972, our family had started spending summers in a fishing village on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, and the scarecrow, which our daughters named Mildew, came our way maybe eight or nine years after that. Mildew was a castoff from an extended family of scarecrows that appeared every spring in the vegetable garden of a retired man named Mr. Dalton, whose creations were eventually included in a picture book of Nova Scotia scarecrows, entitled "Outstanding in Their Fields." She had absorbed enough punishment from Maritime weather to be below Mr. Dalton's standards, but the girls were delighted to have her, even in her decrepit condition. In fact, her condition was a plus, since it presented the opportunity to dress her. We drove into Liverpool, a town not far from our village, to find her some new clothes. That's where Frenchy's came in.



At Frenchy's, dresses are four fifty-five. Men's shirts or women's blouses are three dollars.

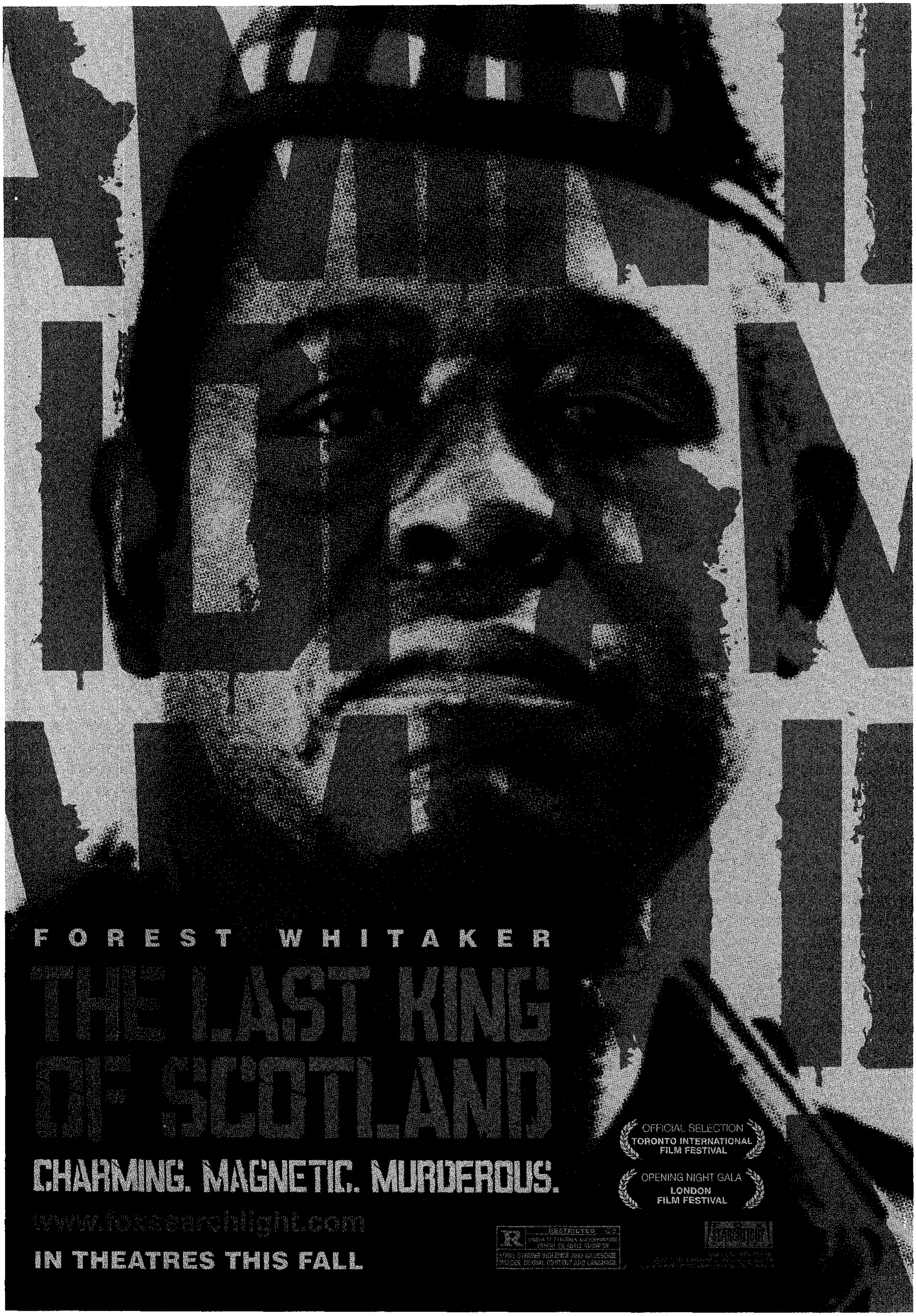
We were already familiar with Frenchy's, whose stores had begun to appear in small towns in the Maritimes about the time we settled into our house on the South Shore. We knew that it had been founded by a man in the rag trade—not the rag trade as the term is sometimes used in New York to mean the garment industry; the man traded in rags—and I had heard that Frenchy's was a last shot at selling dresses and skirts and sports coats and trousers before they made a sort of reverse butterfly transmogrification from something you might wear to the office party to something you might use to apply polish to your shoes.

As I later discovered, a number of American companies sell huge bales of clothing—mostly used clothing that may have been dropped into a charity donation box at the mall or forgotten at the dry cleaner's, but also some new clothing. The buyers of such bales tend to sort out some of the contents for markets in Third World countries and sell the rest as what the trade refers to as "wipers." What Frenchy's began doing with its baled clothing was to sort out some garments suitable for Maritime customers and offer great unruly piles of them in bins labelled "PANTS" or "BLOUSES" or "MEN'S SHIRTS." Among the bins at the Liverpool Frenchy's, we found Mildew a green dress, a hat, a purse, and a pair of boots—not the floppy sort of boots that the fishermen wore but swanky patent-leather boots, with high heels. The cost of this makeover was five or six dollars.

Mildew's outfit was the extent of our Frenchy's shopping at the time. In Nova Scotia, there has never been reason for anyone in our family to think much about wardrobe. Sufficient T-shirts and jeans accumulated in our house over the years. My main clothing problem was trying to remember every spring whether I'd left any vaguely presentable sports shirts in Nova Scotia the previous fall. In those days, we discussed Frenchy's only when we were visited by a friend of ours named Judy, who was the high-school librarian in Liverpool. On her way home from Frenchy's, Judy would sometimes stop by to show off the school clothes she'd snatched from one of the bins for her children. Unlike just about everyone else in our village, Judy had grown up in a good-sized city, and she had some familiarity with clothing labels. She'd hold up a skirt she had bought for one of her daughters—sometimes a brand-new skirt, with the plastic string that had held the price tag still attached—and say simply, "Ann Taylor" or "Calvin Klein" or "Gap."

She didn't have to say how much she had paid. At Frenchy's, all skirts are

EDWARD KOREN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priced the same, and that is also true of, say, all sweaters or all dresses or all overcoats. The Frenchy's store that Judy patronized has closed, but at a similar store in Liverpool called Guy's Frenchy's skirts are now three dollars and sixty-five cents Canadian. Dresses are four fifty-five. Men's shirts or women's blouses are three dollars. Evening gowns are nine dollars. A sports coat is five twenty-five. If it is an orange sports coat with a stain on the lapel, it is five twenty-five. If it is what appears to be a brand-new Ralph Lauren sports coat, it is five twenty-five. Sports coats are five twenty-five.

I am not averse to wearing a sports coat that costs five twenty-five. My basic position on clothing was formed in high school, in Kansas City, where my male classmates and I considered an intense interest in expensive clothing to be not exactly frivolous—after all, most of what we did was frivolous—but, well, sort of la-di-da. I suppose we also considered it unmanly; we took a broad view of what was unmanly. (Not that we didn't have our own rigid beliefs about what constituted proper dress and, in particular, what did not. The contempt that a professionally snooty fashion-magazine editor might have for someone who shows up at a New York charity benefit in last year's color could not exceed the contempt we had for someone who was seen in jeans other than Levi's or Lee's.) One of my high-school classmates had a phrase for someone who wore spiffy and expensive clothes—a "suave dog," with the "suave" pronounced as if it rhymed with "wave." (We didn't have a lot of opportunity to hear words like that spoken out loud.) Even now, many decades later, the sight of a dandy at, say, a cocktail party on the Upper East Side of Manhattan catapults into my mind the phrase "suave dog"—or "*swayve* dog," really, since it comes complete with the Southwest High School pronunciation.

RETURN

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blood foamed in both hands; blood ruined my shoes.
The boy who fired the can off my head in the street
pumped what blood he could into his fleeing legs.
I banged on every door for help, spreading a plague
of bloody fingerprints all the way home to apartment 14-F.

Forty years later, I stand in the hallway.
The dim angel of public housing is too exhausted
to welcome me. My hand presses
against the door at apartment 14-F
like an octopus stuck to aquarium glass;
blood drums behind my ears.
Listen to every door: there is a war on television.

—*Martín Espada*

When I was in college, at Yale, the Levi's or Lee's bluejeans equivalents were tweed sports coats and gray flannels and khakis. I was impressed with the commandment of one of my freshman-year roommates, an amiable boarding-school graduate with three last names, that the only comment a gentleman's outfit should generate is that he is properly dressed for the occasion. Following that commandment meant acquiring some new clothes, some of them secondhand, since the Ivy style, as it was then sometimes called, had not yet penetrated as far as Kansas City. In those days, Yale believed that proper dress for the occasion of having dinner in Freshman Commons included a coat and tie, so I bought a rather ragged sports coat from my roommate for two dollars and seventy-five cents, and I wore it regularly to dinner. Although my daughters, who are now grown, may suspect otherwise, I would like to state for the record that I no longer own it.

On the other hand, the sports coats I do own closely resemble it. You could say that, when it comes to what some fashionistas would call my "look," I considered one adjustment—from high school to college—quite sufficient. Remember what Lillian Hellman told the House Committee on Un-American Activities? "I cannot, and will not, cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." I feel that way about my clothes. My idea of what to wear to dinner has not changed much over the years, nor have I abandoned my high-school belief that spending a lot of money on clothes is, well, la-di-da. (I wouldn't want to be questioned closely about whether I still also find it unmanly.) In other words, I may embody the target audience of Brooks Brothers factory-outlet stores—a thrifty fellow whose tastes are mired in the fifties.

As it happens, Brooks Brothers factory-outlet stores have received a good deal of my custom. On the way home to New York from Nova Scotia, we'd stop in Kittery, Maine, which had become an outlet center—a stop I became much more enthusiastic about after we happened into a place called Bob's Clam Hut, across the highway from the Villeroy & Boch outlet. While the girls were picking up a lot of school clothes, I'd wander over to the Brooks Brothers outlet to top up my supply of blue button-down shirts and, more or less in synch with Presidential-election years, buy a sports coat or a blazer. If we

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stopped off at Freeport, which had also become an outlet center, I would go to the mother church of L. L. Bean, the anchor that had attracted the outlets in the first place, and pick up a couple of pairs of khakis and some sports shirts. By the time we crossed into New Hampshire every fall, I was, sartorially speaking, good to go.

The Frenchy's finds that Judy displayed had, in fact, included brand-new garments from L. L. Bean. Still, I continued to think of Frenchy's stores as something akin to thrift shops—those foul-smelling storefronts I'd visited from time to time in search of out-of-print books. I took no notice when, because of a split in management, the Frenchy's stores in our area began to be supplanted by similar but brighter stores, called Guy's Frenchy's—not, as innocent travellers might assume, a Frenchy's for men's clothing which had a misplaced apostrophe but a Frenchy's named for an Acadian from Digby named Guy LeBlanc. Frenchy's, which is what everyone I knew continued to call both Guy's Frenchy's and the original Frenchy's, was not at the forefront of my mind. Then, during the summer before last, the summer of 2005, all of that changed.

What brought Frenchy's to my attention again was that a woman I know in Liverpool named Kate Killam had decided to become, in effect, a sub-industry of Frenchy's—which, in her case, meant Guy's Frenchy's. Kate, who was born and raised in Liverpool, lived elsewhere for some years. For a while, she was a member of a touring puppeteer troupe. She spent thirteen years in England, part of that time teaching in an art-and-design college in London. She had always had an interest in costumes and fabrics and couture. When she returned to the South Shore, where she eventually decided to stay in order to be near her elderly mother, she set herself up in Mahone Bay, a town that attracts some tourists, as a producer of custom-made garments for women—an occupation she found stupefyingly labor-intensive. What Kate decided to do the summer before last, beginning in a Mahone Bay shop, was to sell high-end clothing that could be described as secondhand if you counted Frenchy's as the firsthand.

Kate's enterprise was based on the fact that Frenchy's, most of whose customers are presumably people of modest means trying to clothe their families in the most economical way possible, has in its inventory garments that appeal to an entirely different clientele—urban career women, for instance, who needed any number of outfits for the office. Over the years, it has become increasingly obvious that some such people already shop at Frenchy's. In a 2001 book, "The Frenchy's Connection," two self-described addicts named Pat Wilson and Kris Wood talk about regularly spotting BMWs in Frenchy's parking lots—presumably transportation for well-off women from Halifax or even Toronto who yearned not only for bargains but for the thrill of the hunt. House guests on the South Shore are sometimes sent off to Frenchy's as a rainy-day tourist attraction, the way they might be sent off to the Fisheries Museum, in Lunenburg. There are stories about people taking a "Frenchy's tour of the province." There are relatively sophisticated summer people in Nova Scotia whose response to being complimented on an item of clothing is to smile knowingly and say, "Frenchy's"—or "Chez François."

At the Guy's Frenchy's stores that Kate patronizes, not much of the inventory is tattered or stained, although all of it is wrinkled. (Some people think that the wrinkling comes simply from

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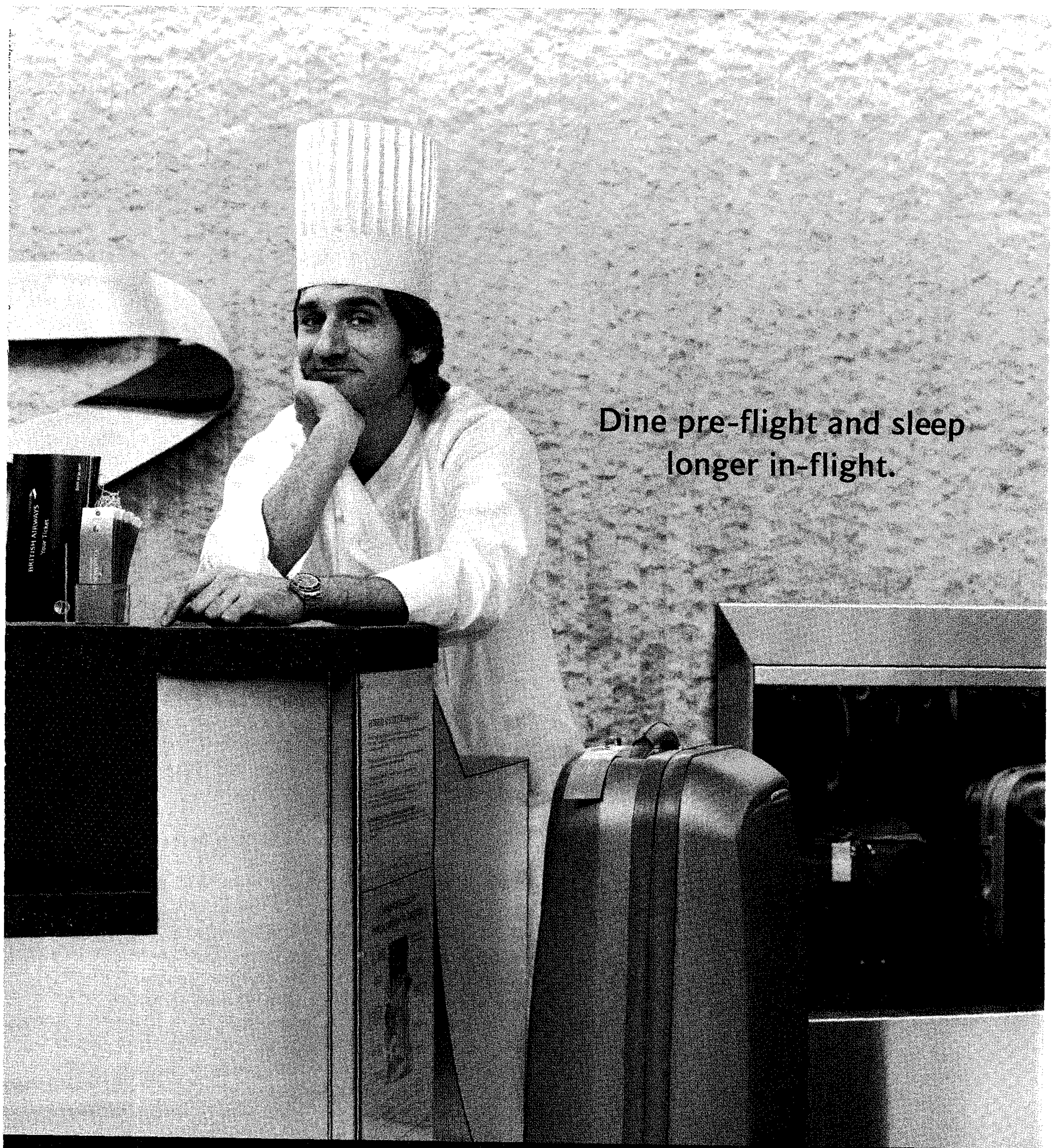
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being squeezed into bales, but I'm drawn to the theory that Frenchy's has a wrinkling center, where all the clothes are put through specially designed wrinkling machines.) The stores do not have a thrift-shop aroma. Still, Kate is aware that many knowledgeable shoppers who love bargains would not shop at Frenchy's. Some of them see tedium rather than adventure in picking through dozens of wrinkled blouses in the hope of finding that wrinkled Prada or Pierre Cardin blouse that's in mint condition and precisely their size. Some of them don't like to be seen in a store that sells clothes of uncertain origin. For such shoppers, Kate intended to act as a sort of editor.

You could say that Frenchy's sells garments for about what they are worth at that stage of their life, just before they become rags. Shorn of the value added by advertising and display and fashion and design, after all, a blouse is just some fabric with armholes. Kate endeavored to put some of the value back on. She would look for good labels or good fabrics or good colors. She would clean and press. She would display on racks in a tasteful setting. At Frenchy's prices, of course, she could take an eight-hundred-per-cent markup and still sell a designer-label skirt for under thirty dollars.

After Kate went into business, I became increasingly attuned to reports of discoveries made at Frenchy's—an Oscar de la Renta jacket, a Gucci purse, a linen coat by Kenzo, a Vera Wang evening gown. A year ago, my friend Philip bought a new Calvin Klein overcoat at the Guy's Frenchy's in Yarmouth; he has never actually worn it, but the pride he takes in what he paid for it seems more than worth the purchase price, considering that all overcoats were then eight dollars. (They have since gone up to nine.) My friend Robin, who grew up in Nova Scotia and now lives in the province during the summer, told me that a nephew of his in Halifax, who always seemed to be beautifully turned out, acknowledges that he owes his dapperness to regular calls at Frenchy's. For the past few winters, Robin himself has been swanning around Manhattan in an Yves Saint Laurent overcoat that, when he bought it, at the Guy's Frenchy's in Shelburne, still had its pockets stitched up. As I listened to these tales of triumphant discovery or gazed at the sparkling line of beautifully pressed and artfully arranged garments in Kate's shop, it began to occur to me that in Frenchy's rather broad customer base there might be a place for me. That's where William Paley came in.

Yes, that William Paley—the late founder of CBS. In 1990, a biography of Paley written by Sally Bedell Smith portrayed him as someone who, though perhaps not terribly admirable as a human being, managed to lead a life that did not include, say, waiting in line at the motor-vehicle bureau. The detail that stuck with me was that when the Paleys went to their house in the Caribbean they merely got on the plane—a private plane, as I remember—and left, secure in the knowledge that all the clothes they needed were already there. William Paley, of course, had resources that I don't have. But he didn't have one resource that I do have: Frenchy's. These days, I step out a bit more in the summer than I did in the Mildew era, when we thought of Nova Scotia principally as a place where we had our girls to ourselves. When I'm invited to dinner by Philip and his wife, Cynthia, for instance—that would qualify as the bright lights in our part of the world—I like to show up in clean khakis and a shirt with a collar. What I realized sometime in July of 2005 was this: for a certain outlay of capital—the outlay I had in mind was twenty-five or thirty dollars—I could, in Paley fashion, just show up in Nova Scotia in the spring without packing or trying to remember if there were already shirts in the bureau. The private plane was a detail I'd have to work out later.

Where could all these shirts have come from? I wondered when I got back to the Nova Scotia house this past summer. There were shirts from Brooks Brothers and from L. L. Bean and from Geoffrey Beene and from the Gap and from Eddie Bauer and from Abercrombie & Fitch. There were shirts with labels I'd never heard of. There was even a shirt with the subtle but unmistakable logo of its manufacturer on the breast pocket, in flat contravention of my personal ban on wearing advertisements. (Levi's are, it almost goes without saying, grandfathered.) For a moment, I entertained the possibility that some prankster, aware of my Paley Plan, had crept into the house in my absence bearing armloads of shirts from Frenchy's. Then, thinking back realistically on the previous summer, I faced the fact that I must have allowed myself to drift from the prudent building of a summer shirt supply into a Frenchy's

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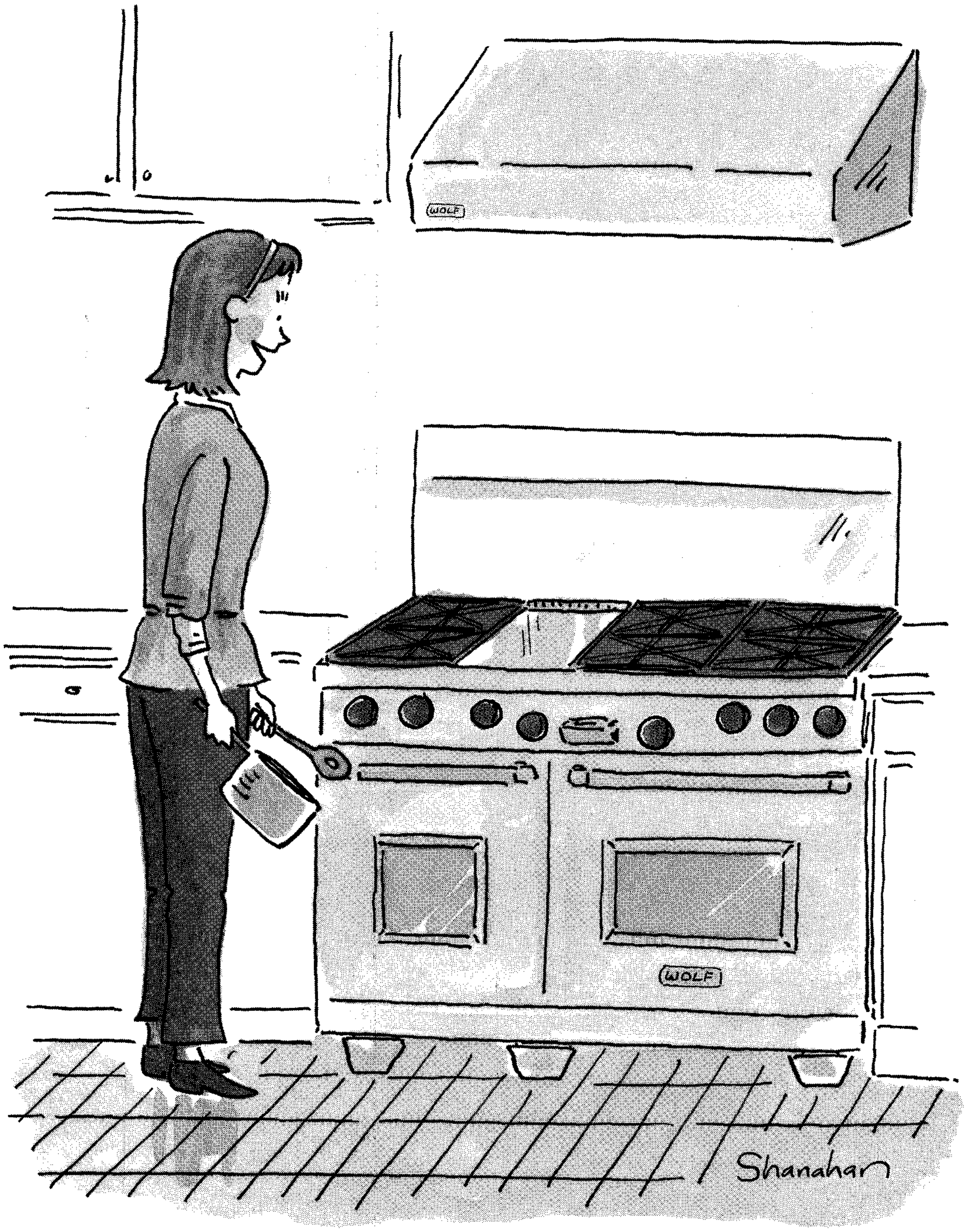
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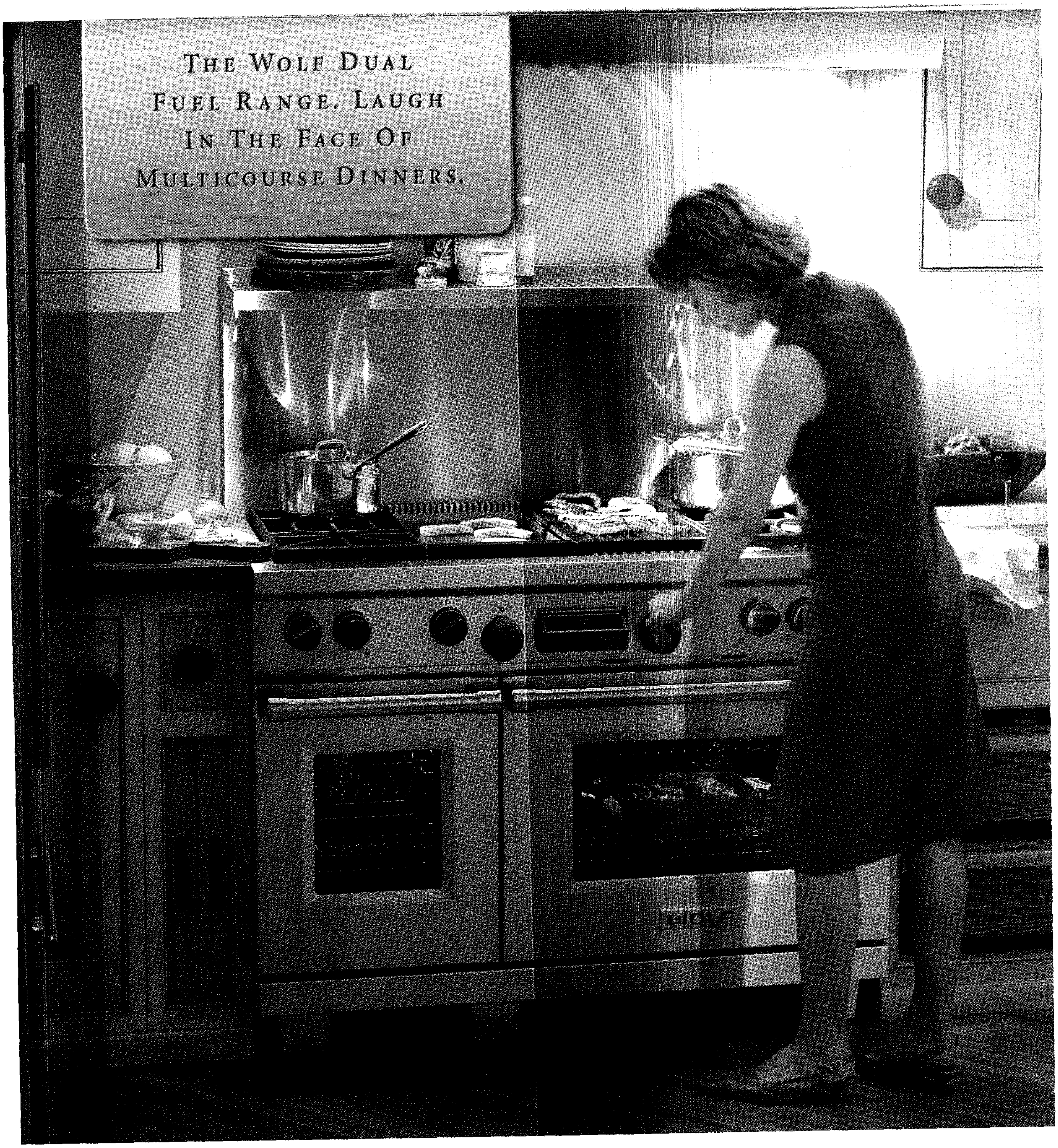
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frenzy—often the first step, I’d heard, toward a full-blown Frenchy’s addiction.

Talk of Frenchy’s was still in the air. At a dinner for Cynthia’s birthday, Kate presented the birthday girl with a stunning sweater by Eskandar. Kate, who had carted off dozens of trash bags full of clothing from Guy’s Frenchy’s during the winter, was excited about plans to expand her operation. She’d had the garage of her house in Liverpool converted into an attractive showroom called Killam Studio to serve local customers by appointment. On a trip to Toronto, she had flogged a number of garments to a high-end consignment shop, and she had her eye on similar shops in New York. She was hoping to have a Web site online by the end of the summer. One morning, I accompanied her to the Guy’s Frenchy’s in Liverpool just to watch her in action: working her way steadily through the sweater bin or the blouse bin, she seemed to be in a sort of focussed high, like a .340 hitter in the batting cage.

With Philip and Cynthia and our friend Jean, I took a trip to the part of Nova Scotia called the French Shore—ostensibly to eat in a restaurant in Grosse Coques that was said to be a refutation of the notion that Maritime Acadians are the only French-speaking people in the world who can’t cook, but partly to check out a couple of Frenchy’s stores right where the original rag man, Edwin Theriault, had begun his operation. (We found that, compared with the Guy’s Frenchy’s stores we were accustomed to, they tended toward what you might call thriftshopishness.) When I was in Liverpool or Bridgewater for errands, I still found myself dropping by the Guy’s Frenchy’s. Why? Certainly not because I needed shirts. As far as I could calculate, by estimating the average life span of a sports shirt and factoring in the number of times I might need to wear one on the South Shore, I had enough shirts on hand in Nova Scotia to last me approximately sixty-five years. I was in the market, I’d decided, for some additional outerwear that I could furnish visitors in nasty weather, and I did buy a sort of pullover windbreaker that bore the logo of the Massachusetts Correction Officers Federated Union. Now and then, I’ll confess, I’d cruise by the shirt table, just for old times’ sake.

Then, while looking for slickers in the Liverpool Guy’s Frenchy’s one day, I spotted something on the overcoat rack. I obviously had no need for an overcoat in Nova Scotia. A warning bell went off in my head: If, in resupplying my New York wardrobe, I dropped down a notch from outlets in Maine to Guy’s Frenchy’s in Liverpool, was the Salvation Army thrift shop the next stop? I took the coat off the rack anyway. I could see that it was new. It was one of those lined trenchcoats of the sort I’d been wearing since college—the sort that is supposed to make you look like Humphrey Bogart playing a foreign correspondent. Instead of being the conventional dun color, though, it was a dark blue, almost black. That was a change, but a change I thought I could handle. The coat had a substantial fur lining, so it was perfect for evenings that were too cold for my dun-colored trenchcoat but too warm for the sub-Arctic parka I got twenty years ago from Eddie Bauer—a responsible company that, as I understand our arrangement, would even now return the full purchase price if I should perish from exposure while wearing the coat in temperatures warmer than thirty degrees below zero. The fur lining of the trenchcoat was itself dark blue, almost black. The label said Bill Blass. The coat was my size. I plonked down the nine dollars, plus tax. When I got back to the house, I tried on my new coat in front of a full-length mirror. It was perfect. I could imagine myself wearing it in New York—perhaps meeting up on a brisk November night with Robin in his Yves Saint Laurent. Both of us might nod toward our coats and say, “Chez François.” As I took the coat off, I heard myself murmur, “Swayve dog.” ◆

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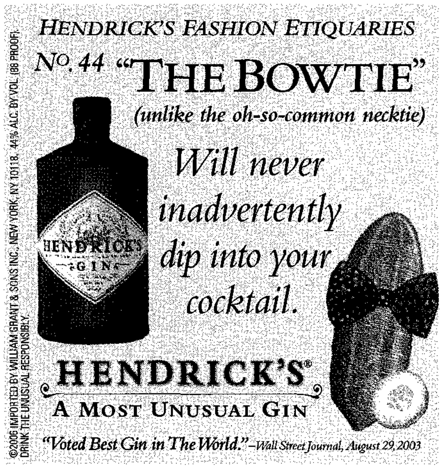

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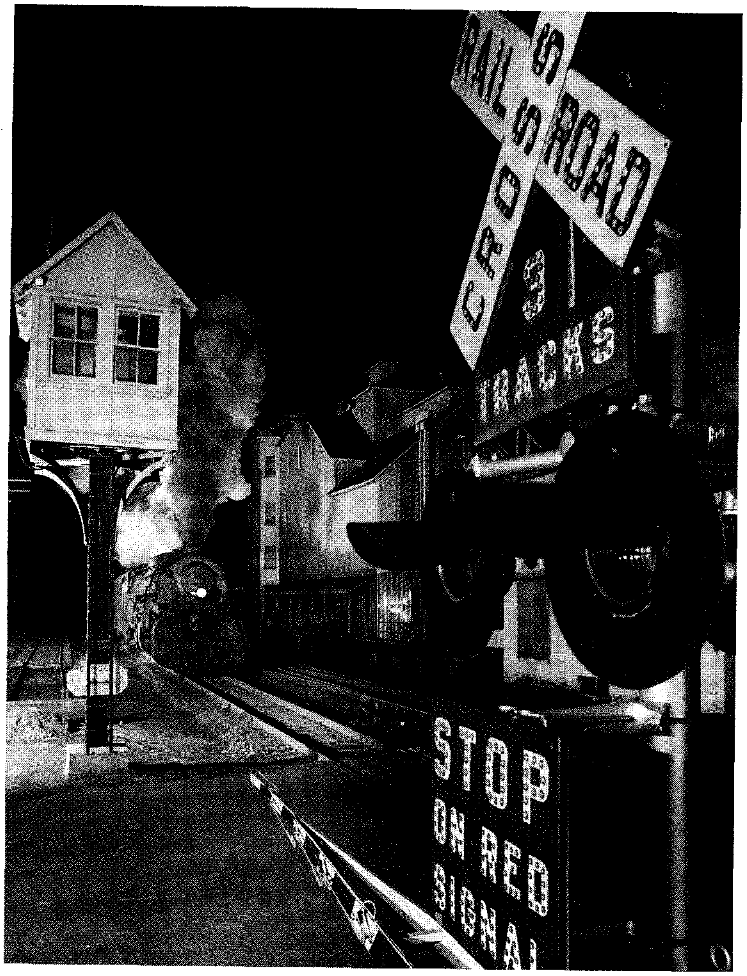

O. WINSTON LINK, "THE LURAY CROSSING" (1956)

In February of 1939, having failed to establish myself as a screenwriter in Hollywood, I decided to hitchhike back to New York, where my future wife waited. It was a bland California morning, pleasant and calm.

The rendezvous with my friend Royer, who was to take me to a road frequented by hitchhikers, was effected with a minimum of anxiety. I was early; he was a half hour late. He said little en route. Remarks about the highway, tags and scraps of nervous observations.

The miles slipped by all too quickly, covering only the merest jot of the great journey stretching before me, the great journey I would soon have to undertake unassisted, unbefriended, and in ignorance.

Where my highway toward El Centro and Royer's toward a walnut ranch forked he let me off. We shook hands. I stood a minute looking after the dwindling vehicle, loath to surrender my last connection to companionship, to someone concerned. The car disappeared around a curve in the road.

Undoubtedly I was too reticent, undoubtedly I was too shy. For all my tentative thumbing, my waggling and waving of arms, I got only as far as the next town, and by then the winter sun was already low in the west. A fellow-hitchhiker offered to guide me to the place he was going to stay: it was something better than a flophouse, he said, but not much.

About a mile hike brought us to the place, and it fitted his description—not much better than a flophouse on the Bowery, the chief difference being the absence of drunks standing, drooping and tattered, in the doorway. Evidently aimed at a clientele of transients like myself, it went by the improbable name of the Dew Drop Inn, and cost fifty cents a night per cubicle. Furnished with only a bed and a light, it was innocent of heat at night, with no showers in evidence, only lavatories and crappers. I was counselled by the occupant of the neighboring cubicle, a little wiseacre with a mustache, to make for Holtville, rather than the route that looked shortest, because it was better travelled and better for picking up rides.

It was a cinch to Holtville—the wise guy with the mustache was right. Effortlessly, I parlayed one ride into another, and reached Holtville early in the afternoon. And there I stuck. And not only I—a whole file of hitchhikers, ludicrous in our numbers, compared with the trickle of traffic going our way. The reason for the scarcity of vehicles wasn't hard to find: from Holtville to Yuma, Arizona, next leg of the journey, lay a stretch of road, fifty miles or more, through desert, devoid of towns. Not only did few autos and trucks make the trip, but for us hitchhikers only the whole trip was of any use. Otherwise, we'd be marooned in the middle of nowhere, in or between hamlets without names, tiny blank circles on a map. Though some trucks did pass by, truckers were enjoined by their insurance companies or by their employers not to pick up riders. The driver of the very infrequent passenger car that went all the way, who might have wished to give someone a lift, seeing that long file strung out along the highway, must have feared that he would be mobbed if he stopped for anyone.

The hours went by; so did the cars and trucks, but I advanced not a yard to-

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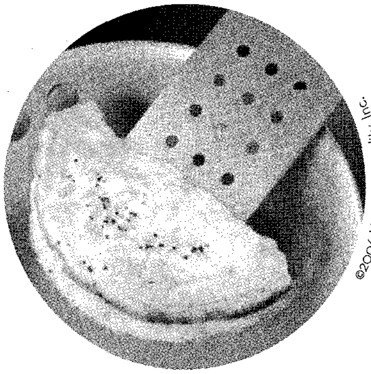

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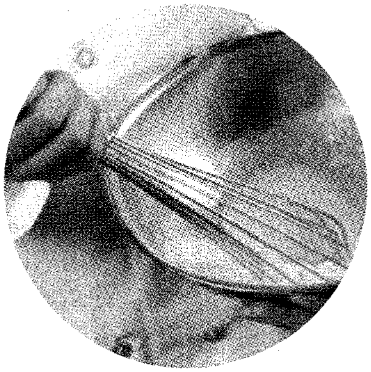

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ward Yuma. And, as far as I could see, neither did anyone else, though most of us must have marched at least five miles back and forth in the hope of finding a more propitious station whereon to stab the air with our thumbs: futile Jack Horners were we. One heard the flinty jests of desperation: some guys had been here for three days (I could well believe it); some had applied for resident status. Many hitchhikers, I could see, having abandoned all hope of getting out of town eastward, had crossed the highway and were thumbing their way back west—and with far greater success. Anything to get out of Holtville, I thought. But then I learned that their aim was to backtrack to a railroad junction and hop a freight from there. To hell with the highways, they said.

I felt the same way myself. But, at a loss, I continued to stab the air with my thumb. Then I struck up with a short-statured wise guy. I thought for a moment that he was the one I had met in the flophouse the evening before, who had advised Holtville as my best bet. But he wasn't. This wise guy had no mustache. Nor would he ever have blown his last fifty cents for a flop, as I soon discovered.

He was as brash a guy as ever I met; his story was that he drove new automobiles from Detroit to California, which somehow enabled the dealer to avoid paying an entry tax. Now and then, he drove a "hot" car, a stolen car, from one state to another. In between, he sold used cars. He had been on a drunk for days. Now he was penniless. He had eaten nothing since yesterday; he was beating his way back to Texarkana, his home town. He knew all the ropes, all modes of travel, both highway—which he damned with heartfelt anathema—and freights. If only he could get to Yuma and the freight yards, wouldn't he show the rest of these lugs how to move? Acting with all the due circumspection of one who has only a few dimes on his person, after great deliberation I invited him into one of the truck stops for coffee and doughnuts. I now had a buddy. His name was Johnny Graham.

We thumbed in tandem now, buddies, but to no avail. Seeking luckier spots, we passed and passed again the prominent sign on the road that read: "Soliciting Rides Liable to Chain Gang."

"I'm gonna steal that goddam sign," Johnny threatened.

But night came, and, lit up by approaching headlights that never slowed down, the sign was still there. So were we. At last, miraculously, our symbiosis paid off. Because I treated him to another round of doughnuts and coffee in the truck stop, he and I were free to solicit drivers, our fellow-diners, directly. My polite entreaties got me only "Sorry, bud, it's my job." For all his brazen importunings, his truck-driver cant, his bold familiarity, Johnny didn't fare any better. A few times, truck drivers seemed on the point of yielding, but thought better of it. Then, at 2:15 A.M., Johnny's tactics paid off: "All right, you win," the trucker said.

In the back of the cab, behind the driver and his helper, was a concealed bunk, and that was to be our hidden roost for the next fifty miles. The truck butted through the freezing, thin night air, the treads of the heavy tires crooning to the highway asphalt. Through the bunk's portholes, single stars kept pace with us for long distances, steady as icy rivets. The truck slowed down, came to a stop. In the cold void, we heard a woman's voice, though we could see no one, a young woman's voice, cheery and clear, in greeting. And then the cab door opened, slammed shut; again the heavy vehicle lumbered into speed. Johnny and I merely looked at each other. All that mattered was that we were rolling toward Yuma. Perhaps another quarter to a half hour passed, and then the truck came to a stop. We heard the driver get out: "Far as I can take you, fellas." He opened the bunk door. "Can't take you into town."

"Sure! Sure!" We understood. We sprang from the bunk down to the highway. "Thanks, Mister. Thanks, pal. Thanks a million."

The truck stayed there, and we soon walked out of range of its dimmed headlights. Incurious, we did not turn at the sound of truck door opening, thudding closed. With hope renewed, we walked briskly toward the east, toward a horizon still seamless with night, starry, in quiet, keen air, and made out the first city lights about a half mile away: Yuma. And soon we were treading sidewalk.

The gleam of a diner pried into

the dark street, promising warmth, food, coffee, against the inhospitable desert gloom behind us. "Coffee an'?" I invited.

"Sure would." Sheer animal hunger sounded in his plea.

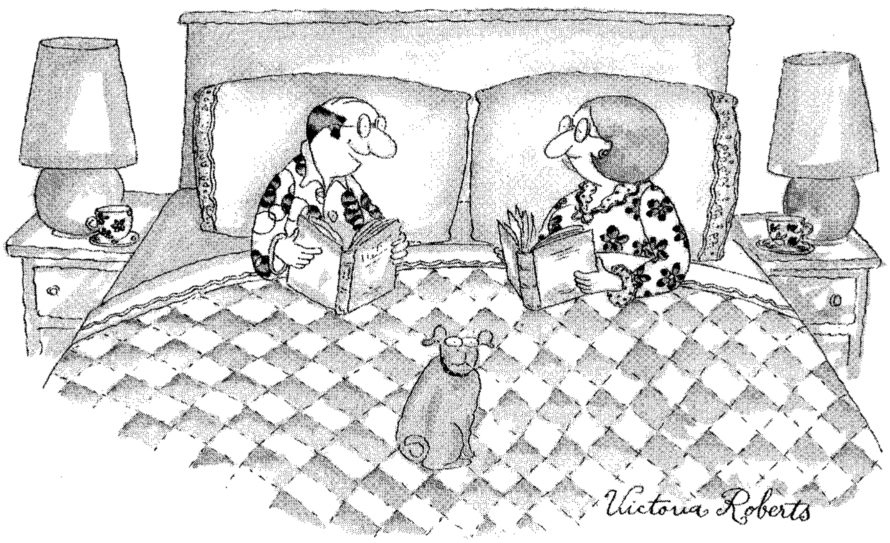
We entered, into humid comfort, found stools, ordered—coffee and two doughnuts apiece (at a cost of ten cents each) and, asking the waitress to hold it a sec, took turns to the lavatory.

And now, refreshed, another brisk walk, to the freight yards, as the night sky streaked into abrasion of dawn. Johnny spoke to other hobos moving along the gravel lanes between freights, and we found a boxcar and clambered aboard. We congratulated ourselves on being alone, on having a private freight car. Alas, too soon. By the time the gray gravel between tracks shone in broad daylight, twenty more birds of passage had joined us. The door of the boxcar opened briefly on warm sunshine when a belated hobo climbed aboard, and rolled closed again. And finally, after those rumblings and bumpings, the mysterious joltings heralding the setting forth of freight trains, we clanked into motion, picked up speed, and were on our way. We rolled the door open to let in the sun. Some of us stretched out on the boxcar floor; some lay jackknifed against the walls; some sat. A gray bearded old hobo, a "bindle stiff," Johnny labelled him, methodically unfurled various-sized rectangles of blanket and, sighing tranquilly, with hands locked together, reclined on his improvised couch, his head propped up by a stained knapsack.

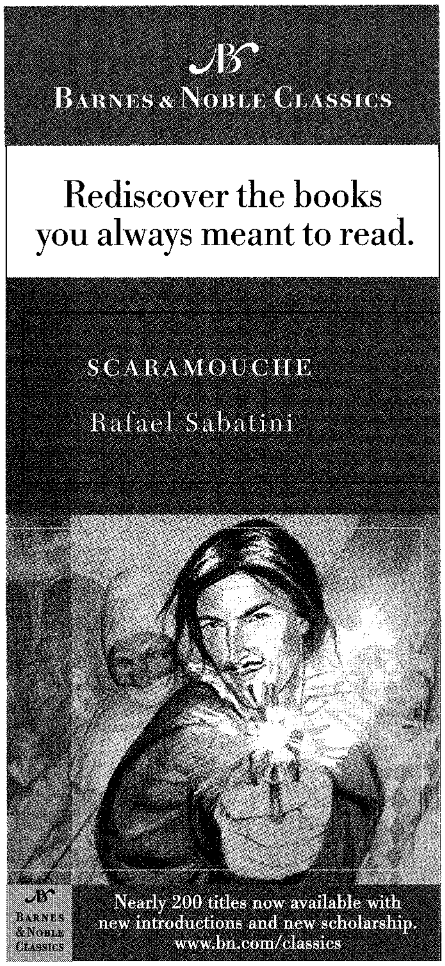
I found a place next to Johnny. I hadn't slept in twenty-four hours. Awhile I watched in gratitude as the spectacular Arizona landscape whizzed past the open boxcar door—sunny butte and sloping sunlit mesa. And then overpowering drowsiness meshed everything together into a single clacking carrousel. Ah, what was more wonderful than travelling by freight!

The train made a stop in Tucson. How long it would stay there nobody knew. For an hour or so, we joined the other hobos basking on the sun-warmed planks adjacent to the railroad street crossing. And then, bored, impatient, we strolled over to Main Street and, with the security of outcasts, studied the prosperous citizenry. A rodeo was due to be held that afternoon, so the town may have had more than its usual complement of visitors, and these and the notices of the coming diversion, and the air of anticipation engendered by it, beguiled us into loitering overlong. When we got back to the freight yard, our train had left.

Another was due in a little while, the hobos said. And, soon after, it thundered into the yard, slowing down, but only as if it meant to go on. I ran alongside at top speed, Johnny behind me. I had already been instructed never to grab the steel ladder at the end of a boxcar, but only the one at the beginning—in the direction the train was moving—



"If I weren't so fond of you, I'd probably be really fond of someone else."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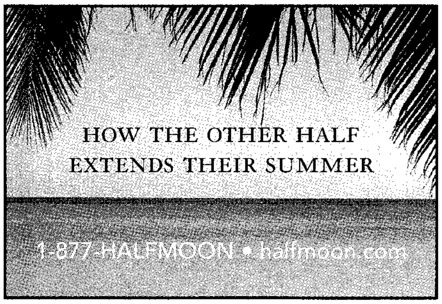
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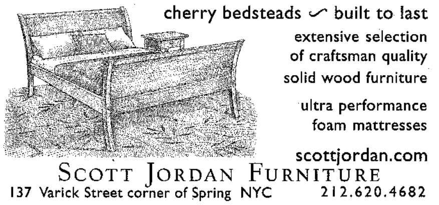
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because a miss on the rear ladder might mean plunging headlong under the wheels of the following car, while a miss on the front ladder would only send me slamming against the freight wall, and I would be hurled back, away from the train. So I made a grab for the front-end ladder, grasped, held on, climbed up to the catwalk atop the freight, knelt, clung to the catwalk—and the train suddenly stopped. Johnny howled with laughter.

"Jeez, that is funny," I said. "Risk your neck, and have the train stop."

"No. You're funny."

"Me?"

"You're hot shit, the way you grab a train on the fly." Johnny guffawed again. "If I ever saw anybody who couldn't make up his mind gettin' on a freight, it's you."

"Yeah? Why?"

"Chrissake, grab the goddam ladder. It ain't gonna bite ye."

Chagrined at my ineptitude, I followed Johnny along the catwalk, leaping the gap from car to car. But chagrin was a luxury I couldn't afford here; even reflecting on it was inadmissible for somebody being whittled down to nobody, just another hobo, and an incompetent one at that. Pay attention. Watch what you're doing.

"Here's a reefer," Johnny said. He pulled up the rust-covered hatch and peered down. "Nobody in it."

In the dark refrigerator compartment, its length running the width of the freight, and little more than a yard wide, a steel ladder, affixed to the wall, led down to the bottom. We descended, and looked back overhead, where the reefer hatch could be rigged ajar by an attached rod. Johnny climbed up a few rungs and set the rod.

"You got an extra handkerchief, right?"

"Yeah. What d'you want?"

"Gimme it, will ye?" And, taking the handkerchief, he wedged it under the supporting brackets of the tilted hatch. "That's so a brakey knows we're down here." He climbed down and explained: tramps asleep when the brakeman overhead locked the hatch in freezing weather—to protect the cargo—had been frozen to death when the car was left on a siding out of earshot.

"I get it."

FOUR POEMS

I'd like to buy her some toffee
but I don't have a daughter

as I pass a sidewalk store in autumn.

•

Exhausted
the mother has fallen asleep
so her baby is listening all alone
to the sound of the night train.

•

Frogs croaking in flooded paddies—
if there really is a world beyond,
echo far enough so my dead brother can hear.

•

A boat whistles in the night.
For a moment I too long to sail away

but merely pull the blanket up over the kids.

—*Ko Un*

(*Translated, from the Korean, by Brother Anthony of Taizé, Young-moo Kim, and Gary Gach.*)

The train began moving. We half sat, half reclined on the reefer floor. It was not a solid floor but a drainage floor: curved steel bars about a half-inch thick with two-inch spaces between them enabled the water of melting ice cakes in the summer to escape to a tray and the tracks beneath. The steel drainage scimitars pressed cruelly into my buttocks.

Johnny soon fell asleep. I lit my pipe, and watched smoke vent through the transom of the rigged hatch into the narrow dusk of day's end. The chill penetrated as the light faded. Soon, frigid dark roared into the confines of the empty ice compartment. How to pass the long night?

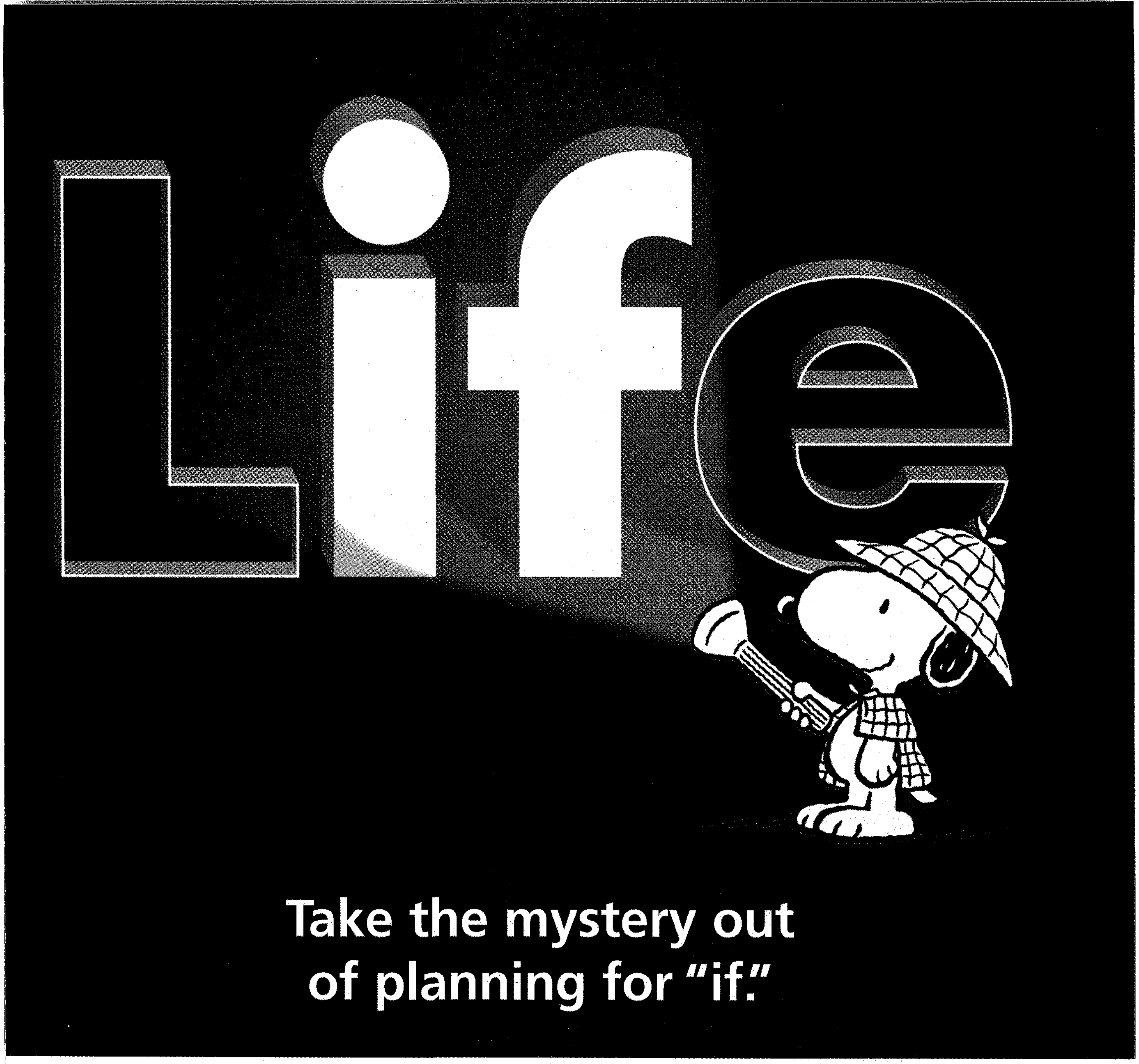
Long night awake...long night cold...long night on a freight, five days old...long night of *clackety-clack, clackety-clack* on wheels pounding eastward over the segmented tracks...

Howooo. Train whistled approaching a level crossing. What crossing? A crossing in Texas. How to pass the long cold night?

Why, writer manqué, are you not? Novelist manqué, no? Desperately balked of all the narratives that you tried, narratives that came to naught, no? Came to nort, all abort.

Why, sternly bring your faculties to a focus by composing an autobiography, freely associative...but governed by implicit rules of narration...augment suspense toward a climax...a climax that would exclude present distress. Hey, good ground rules: augment suspense toward a climax...that would exclude...the cold ache of legs as you lean against the swaying wall, the icy carving of the scimitar bars into butt...or shoulder...or flank, driving you upright again. Where would you begin? You already told them of your Lower East Side boyhood in one novel; what would you do, then?

No, what happens in this vision I have, in this early manhood, seems to defy the ground rules I just laid down. In



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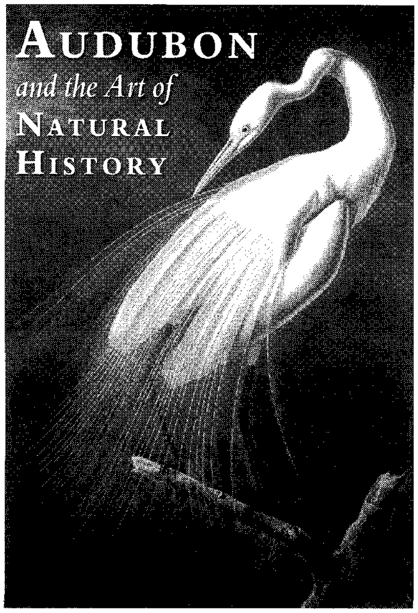

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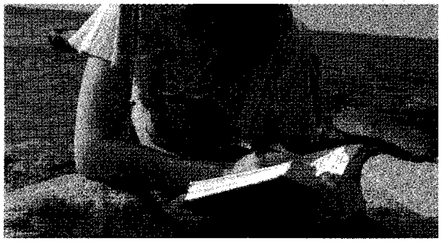

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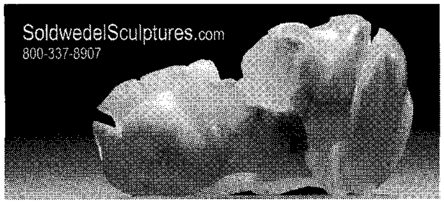

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this thundering crypt above the rails, I see my life as pivoting about certain crucial, certain critical points, where the event determined the rest, the lamentable sequence that followed inexorably in its wake. *Clackety-clack. Clackety-clack.* The year is 1914. Now, that's one year after the year in which my novel concludes. Right? Here's the nub of the disaster: Zayde and Baba (grandfather, grandmother), two uncles, and two aunts, one skip ahead of the Great War, depart Galicia, sell—Zayde does—the little *gevelb*, the little store, in the little hamlet of Veljish (on no map at all), which pays for second-class passage to *Ameritchka*, to New York, to join us. Now, were it not for that semi-Americanized whoremonger of a hotel waiter, my uncle Saul, who looked down his snooty beak at the East Side, and persuaded the Galitzianer pilgrims to settle in Harlem, ah, how different my history would have been, how different I. For Mom would have been content to remain on the East Side, in our lofty aerie overlooking the breezy East River, on Avenue D and Ninth Street. And I would not have been plucked out of my Orthodox Yiddish mini-state like a what? Vegetable, or a mandrake in Blake's etching. I would have grown up in unquestioned Orthodoxy, tough little cocksure fisticuffian gamin, who had to hide under the bed when mothers came looking for him for having bloodied their kids' noses. Me, I, alas, who in the course of a single year among the Irish on 119th Street in East Harlem went from a wiry kid to "Fat, fat, the water rat. Fifty bullets in your hat." Oh, don't blame the Irish.

I was outnumbered, and hung around Mom, even learning to embroider cloth between two hoops while I sat on the stoop beside her. Jewboy Achilles become Mama's boy, tied to her apron strings. Oh, don't blame the Irish. I should have fought, biffed and battled, for I was once good at it, and that was their language: biff and battle. I had nothing else to recommend me: poor eyes, maladroit, too, couldn't catch a ball and couldn't throw one, lousy at stickball. Who knew about such goyish sports on the East Side? Or marbles, or pitching pennies? But don't blame the Irish. A punch in the nose for a punch in the nose. Jew bastard! But oh, untroubled I had been in my milieu, amid jabbering Jews under the omnipotent sway of a Hebrew God. And then I was suddenly hurled into the alien and incomprehensible goyish maw of East Harlem. Wanna fight? No. So don't blame the Irish. . . .

Go sit and brood, sit and brood, if you can rest your ass on serried scimitars.

But that was the first, that was the first switch in the tracks, I still insist. First major fork in life's journey. And *clackety-clack* and *clackety-clack* all you damn please.

The movers stole Mom's red coral beads. Red coral beads, red coral beads, Mom's mourned-for cherry-red coral beads. They disappeared in transit to Harlem.

But I got no support, I got no support. What the hell do you expect of a kid who had a timid mouse of a father, frightened, panicky, whacked the daylights out of me when Mrs. True from upstairs accused me of pushing her kid to the sidewalk, which I never did, but the pack of little goyim he was with ran when I turned in mock menace. She slapped me in front of Pop, and then he added a barbarous beating, so atrocious that dumpy, squat Mrs. Shapiro from the first floor intervened: "You'll destroy your own son for a goya?" And Mom arrived from shopping, frantic hearing my screams all the way through the hall, planting herself before Pop, the frenzied madman, and demanding of Mrs. True belligerently, "Vot you vant?"

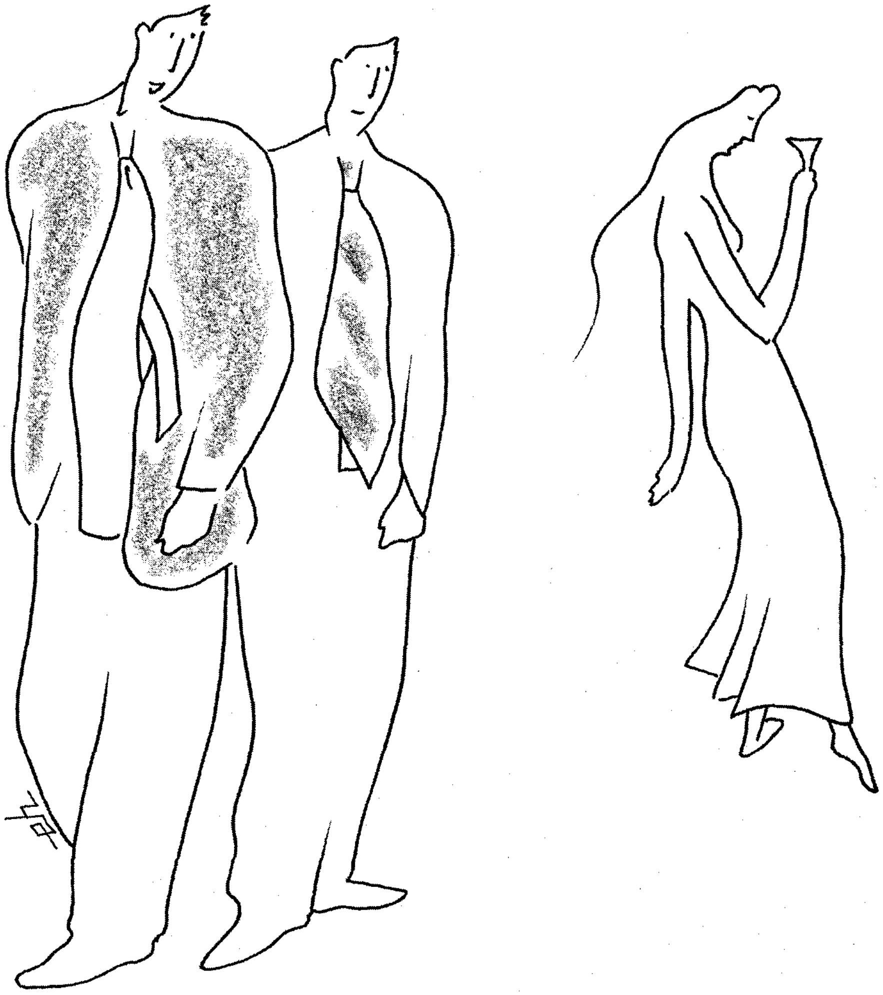
Oh, my mother. How ugly, how lowering gloomy the kitchen setting. Oh, my mother. Beaten the hell out of, drubbed to a whimper, to a snivelling nullity—

Try rolling over to the other flank.

I can't say it often enough. They had no right to pluck me out like a radish, like a beet, like a scallion, like a parsnip from among my own. And force me to grow hydroponically, a root crop like me, that adored the dirt and the din of the twoscore streets of my Jewish mini-state. The irony of it: Zayde, given name Ben Zion, Orthodox Jew with a beard, comes to these shores with his family, and undoes Orthodoxy. You forget the anticipation, the delirious anticipation of the June day, sitting two flights up in the new apartment prepared for them by Saul and Mamie, my aunt, who lived across the street on 115th Street between Park and Madison, a nice "*bitvinn*" it was called. What did that little tyke imagine his newly arriving kinfolk would look like? Rich, generous, loving Jewish nobility come to rescue him from the unhappiness of the hostile goyish environment of 119th Street! Jewish nobility come to irradiate his unhappy home life! Empathetic, aye, opulent kinfolk, informed with novelty, with captivating fable, proffering handfuls of silver coins, endlessly doting, endlessly rejoicing in him.

Instead, getting out of the two taxicabs to the screams of hysterical Mamie from on high of "Tata, Tata! Oy, Mama, Mamaleh!" that drew the attention of all passersby within earshot on the street below were six ordinary, newly arrived, bewildered Jewish immigrants from Galicia in the erstwhile Austrian Empire.

With Saul overseeing the unloading of persons and baggage, amid commotion in the hall, the newcomers and their escorts ascended to the apartment. Everybody rushed in. Embraces ensued, resounding embraces. Under the supervision of Zayde, the newcomers were herded to the kitchen sink, and each rinsed his or her mouth with salt water. I swear, they rinsed it with something. Epsom salts? Nah. Go ask an Orthodox Jew. But that isn't the crux of the matter; the crux of the matter is, or was, that your dreams of noble permissiveness, openhanded, free-hearted affection, contracted into a bearded, paunchy Jew who spoke Yiddish so dense you could scarce make way against it, contracted into a Slavic, snub-nosed, gentle, dear, depleted Baba, with little gold-rimmed eyeglasses, dam of a dozen offspring. The older of the two immigrant uncles looked like Baba, stocky, aged eighteen, with a head of thick, wavy chestnut hair,



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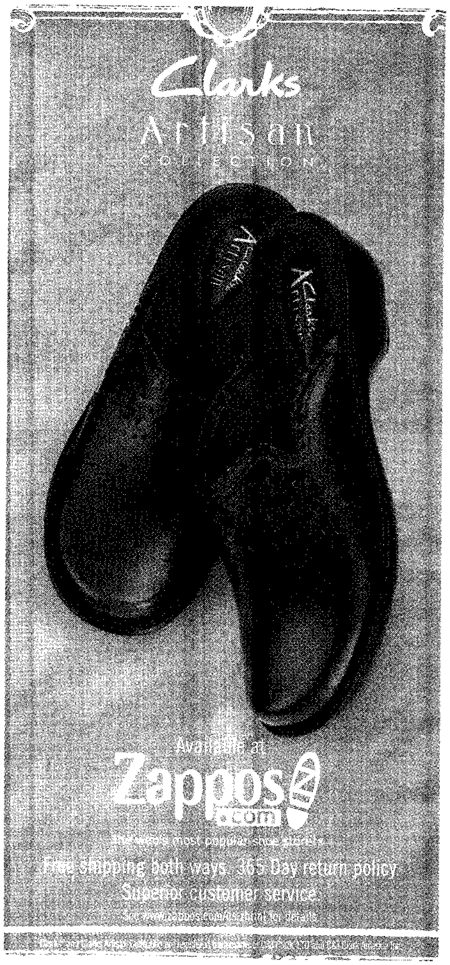
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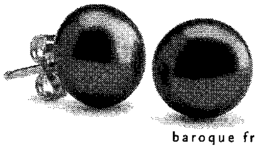
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and the younger uncle, long-nosed and straight-haired, dazed into reticence, stood apart, gangly and tall. One aunt, the older, was composed and slow-spoken, while the other aunt was green-toothed, erratic, and noisy with excitement. Both homely. I shrank. Too much to absorb, all their lopsided gesticulations, shrugging, their grimaces and outcries: "*Oy, gevalt un azoy, oy, gevalt un azoy! Takeh emes? Un azoy! Oy ich khalesh un azoy!*"

With Mom's permission to leave, with a nickel to comfort me, but still dejected, I walked to Central Park, and there climbed the granite outcrop atop the rowboat-dotted lake on 110th Street. And along a crease in the ground in a bosky grove where ran a little trickle of rainwater I became the buckskinned and fringed American Scout, self-reliant, self-sufficient, in the pristine wilderness of America I knelt down and drank, in ritual, dim commitment. Sipping from the polluted rivulet in much-trodden Central Park. That's not the crux; that's just a boyhood memory.

Oh, my legs ache, ache standing. But sitting down is scant comfort on a seat of sabres.

The brain incandesces and fades, synapses glow and gutter out. You left Judaism, right? Right, ol' boy, ol' boy. Left Judaism, and damn glad to. You go with Zayde on a sleepy summer Shabbes to the shul, to the prayer-book musty tenement ground-floor synagogue, sit hour after hour and daven where shown, pray but not know what for, glibly match the right sounds to the printed letters, as you were taught to do on the East Side. And Zayde's proud of you, his oldest grandson, sure, sure, growing up devout. But the thing wears threadbare for a kid, is a hell of a bore—even though, ah, that was fun, at the Havdalah service—Havdalah, wasn't it? Half a dollah. To be made much of by the other bearded Jews, Shloymeh F., Zayde's so dignified older brother, actually wore a shiny silk top hat on Shabbes, what a stereotype target for snowballs if he'd ever appeared in my part of Harlem, among the juvenile scamps, Shloymeh with his forked gray beard and proud bearing and rich clearing of the throat. And the other pious congregants offering the only urchin at the Havdalah wine and lovely segments of salt herring, and—man, when that hit my palate the first time!—ripe wrinkled Greek olives.

All right, all right, sit down, if you can't stand up anymore. But the novelty wasn't enough to keep you coming regularly. So you shirked. And you and little Eddy F., the Irish widow janitor's kid, became friends, and he showed you how to make tin-can telephones that stretched on a string from his flat on the ground floor to yours a flight up the worn stairs. And after many a fuzzy greeting, many a humming giggle and blurry message, you were well on the way to shedding your Judaism.

I stood up. Cold vacancy, interminable rattle and roar, my partner curled up in sleep, and a single blue star trailing like a distant kite, in and out of view. I'm tired of your yarn. The point is I'm here on this jigging jiggling freight. I survived. I'll wait the goddam night out. I'm surly, I'm rancorous.

Weariness thrust in abeyance by the sudden thud on the roof of the freight car, I looked up: *thud.* Someone had leaped from one freight roof to another. The reefer hatch was lifted. Density of a person obliterating his shape of night sky, bowed, "Who down dere?" under stars spreading all about him. "Hey, you—you down dere?" A Negro voice.

"We are!" I yelled up. And alarmed: "Hey, Johnny!"

"Wha' ?"

"How many you down dere?"

Apprised in an instant, and instantly hostile: "There's two of us down here already. That's enough. We don't want no more."

The one overhead lingered for a moment, and then withdrew.

"Boy, it's cold up there right out in the open. I hope he finds someplace to hide," I said.

"He's a nigger. He'll find a place to duck. I never worry about 'em." Arkansas spoke through Johnny.

"I wonder where the hell he's been? Come out all of a sudden that way."

"He should have stayed wherever he was, God damn him. I was sleepin' good. I mighta slept all the way to El Paso." He reached for his cap, massaged his glimmering features, yawned noisily, his teeth gleaming at the terminal grunt.

An hour later, Johnny's glimmering face tipped up toward the roof. "You hear that?"

"I think so."

"Is that the nigger again?"

"I don't know."

"It can't be a shacky."

"No? Why not?"

"If he was closin' up the reefers, we'da heard them other hatches slam."

"You mean closed against the cold?"

"Yeah. It's that black bastard."

Certainty grew, grew as swiftly as the distant thud of someone landing on the catwalk at the farther end of the freight became bounding footsteps approaching. Desperate hands raised the hatch overhead.

"Hey, I'm comin' down, man. I'm freezin'."

"There's two of us down here already. I told you. Stay out!"

"Dere's three, fo' in de others. Dere's five in one."

"Bullshit. Keep goin'."

"Been over de whole freight, man. Dere's only two o' you." The voice was young. "I'm comin' down."

"You try it! I'm tellin' you, boy. Two's enough down here."

The figure peering down from above didn't seem so much uncertain as restrained, trying to sense by instinct what the temper was below, the forces he had to brace himself to confront.

"For Christ sake, let him come down," I whispered.

"What for? Fuck's too lazy to go all the way up to the locomotive. There's lots o' reefers."

"That hatch cover! Jesus, if he locked us in— You crazy?"

"I'm comin' down, man."

Raised all the way, the hatch opened into a transom gorged with stars. Cascades of starlight poured through the gaping sluice above as he stooped, took his first step down, his booted foot seeking the rung below; and before he closed the hatch, stemming the flood of starlight above him, something—something metallic—glinted in the same hand. Down he came to the reefer bottom—woefully underclad, only a jacket over his shirt. With hands in pockets, "Man, I'm cold. Gettin' out o' dat wind like comin' to a stove."

"It's all right," I said.

Johnny moved silently to my side of the compartment.

"I guess we got room," I said. "Where were you?"

"In a gondola. Layin' flat an' huggin' de bottom. Man, I like to freeze to death. I said I gotta get outa here, I gotta get outa here, 'fo' I freeze stiff. I tried ridin' behind a tank car. Too cold to live."

"You want a smoke?"

"Sleep. Dat's what I want, man." He took his hand out of his jacket pocket. "I 'fraid to go to sleep in dat gondola. If I fall asleep in dat gondola, dey pick me up froze harder'n a rock. This is the fust time I feel safe to sleep."

Drawing his knees up, his small hat jammed down on his head, he slipped to

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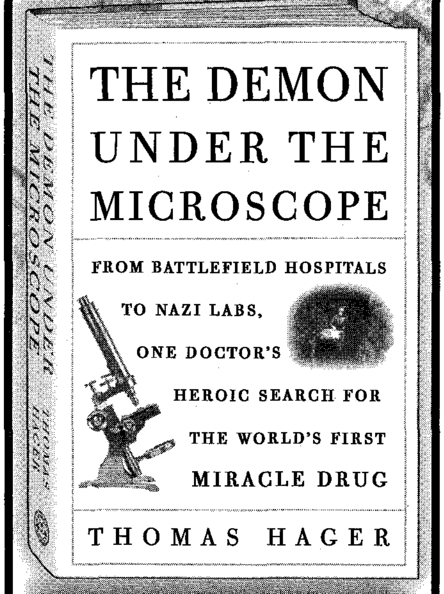
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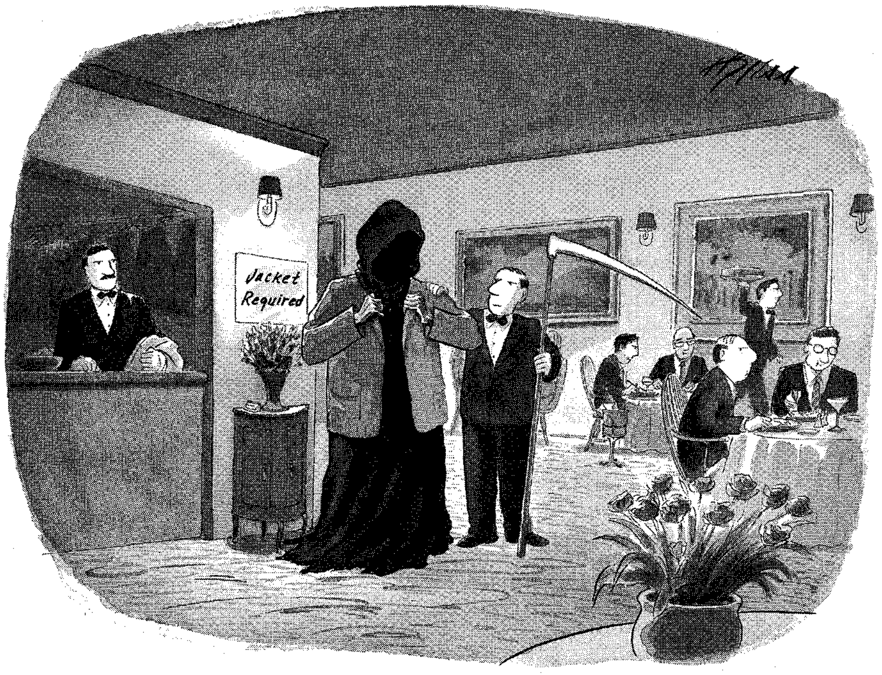

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the reefer floor, and as he turned on his side he retrieved a short length of glinting metal from his jacket pocket, slid the hand holding the object between the curved steel bars of the drain, and deposited the glinting piece on the drip pan beneath. He was asleep in a minute—coughed himself awake; his hand groped between drainage bars, and, reassured, he stretched out his legs as far as he could, hat still jammed down on his small head, motionless, audibly, he fell asleep.

"He's got a knife," Johnny whispered.

"I guess so."

"Son of a bitch. That's why he come down. Two of us, he figured, an' he's got a knife."

"What the hell's the difference?" I hissed. "He's asleep, isn't he? That's all he wanted."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, bullshit." The pervasive shadowy Jew in the background flinched against myriad wounds suffered in centuries past. "Listen, Johnny, I'm not going to argue about it. It's a waste of time. You want to stretch out and go to sleep? Go ahead. I can't sleep. I'll—I'll watch."

"I'm not afraid of him. It ain't that. They're all yeller anyway. It's just that nobody else'd let him down, an' we did. Shit, they'd tell him there was six in the reefer."

An angry silence. Better keep quiet. Futile: you'll never penetrate that barrier; you don't even understand it, can't put it into words. Screwy. No more sense than a puppy dog chasing his tail. Think of something else.

I slid down to his end of the steel bars of the drainage floor. "Ow." Released from aching knees, I welcomed the few minutes of respite before the rigid scimitars against my buttocks supplanted old pain with new.

"I can see what he's got." Johnny settled beside him.

"You can?" Listlessly, "What?"

"Table knife, that's all. It's no goddam razor."

"All right. I got a jackknife. How's that?"

"Better git it out an' keep it open. Just keep it open in your jacket pocket."

"Oh, for Christ sake." Peevishly, I rolled my rump away from the biting drainage bars, pulled the jackknife out of my back pocket, opened the three-inch Boy Scout blade, and exhibited it.

"You stab with it," Johnny said. "Go right for the belly. Know what I mean? You hold the blade down with your thumb and stab."

"Oh, nuts." I dropped the open jackknife into my jacket pocket.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I retorted angrily. "You know what I think? You got it ass backward.

That poor colored guy is carrying that cheesy knife to protect himself. That's why. They wouldn't let him into any of the reefers. You can tell why he came down here. If he was going to fight for his life to keep from freezing, we were his best chance. Jesus, can't you see that? The guy's sleeping on that goddam steel like a feather bed. Look at him. He hasn't moved an inch in all this time. Doesn't hear us. Anything. He's absolutely worn out."

"Worn out, my ass. He's used to it. You don't know these fuckin' niggers. They're tougher'n rawhide."

"O.K. I've had enough. I don't want to talk about it anymore."

Bang and jerk of freight-car coupling. Each time the car slacked its motion over flat Texas, I reflected, the locomotive had to jerk it onward. That goddam boob and his nigger nuttiness had me sitting here with an open Boy Scout knife in my jacket pocket. Christ, absent-minded as I was—and cold—I was apt to cut myself before I cut anybody else. I ought to snap the blade closed before I thrust my hand in my pocket to warm my fingers. Boy, that crazy Arkansas bastard. Wasn't he crazy?

"Want the tobacco?" I made a peace overture.

"Nah.... Thanks. I'm beginnin' to feel like a little shut-eye again."

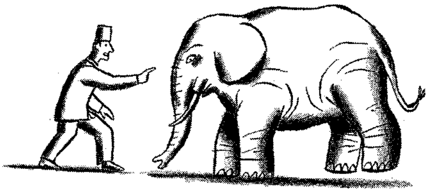
"Yeah? Wish I could say the same. I feel it, but it doesn't do me any good."

"What're you gonna do? Be a watchman till light?"

"I don't know. It looks that way."

"Aw, let's have a smoke, if you're not going to sleep. O.K.?" I brought out the can of Prince Albert. We rolled cigarettes, struck a match, lighting up the thin, jackknifed form sound asleep on the gleaming steel drainage bars. We smoked in silence.

Nothing to do. Lead the way. Pretend to sleep. Maybe the guy would follow suit, and we could drop the subject. I mashed the half-smoked cigarette against a drainage bar, curled on my side. Room enough for my shoes to the side of the sleeper's boots...



The stratagem worked. In a few minutes, when I cautiously lifted my head to peer, with arm pillowing face, Johnny's dark form lay bunched in sleep. Jesus, the arch-enemies, offset, end to end, nether to nether, like a what? Couldn't think of anything. Feet to feet. Two feet to feet. *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*... in a reefer...

That was sleep coming on, sleep. Ah, sleep, it is a precious thing, beloved from pole to pole... Oh, threshold, beautiful threshold of let go.

Utterly spent, I slept until after daybreak, until after morning light was framed in the rigged hatch overhead, unaware that my two fellow-travellers were standing hunched over at opposite walls of the reefer, saying little. I awoke when the freight's tempo changed, the slowing down of motion allowing the distinct creak of car and train tracks beneath to emerge from the roar.

"We comin' to de yahds," the young Negro said, slender and limber, now that I could see him—and chipper, too, in movement. He had apparently slept the night through from the minute he lay down.

"We're gittin' to El Paso," Johnny said. "C'mon, wake up. We got to get ready to get off her."

Dreary and stiff, I got to my feet.

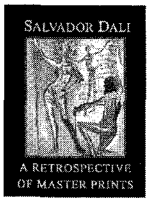
"No bull ketch me climbin' down," the Negro youth announced confidently. "Ah run him a race on de roof to a gondola, an' den oveh de other side."

"Yeah? What if he pulls a gun?"

"Ah jump the other side of de freight, man, like I tol' you, 'fo' I let him pistol-whip me."

He seemed capable of it, too, lithe and agile. And as the train kept up its moderate, even rate of speed, he knelt down on one knee, slipped his brown flat wrist through the space between the drainage rails, and brought out the ordinary table knife we had seen him secrete there the night before. The streaked roughness of the crudely sharpened blade flashed a moment in daylight. He dropped it into his jacket pocket. Dully, I weighed his motives. Certainly he wouldn't dare—against a railroad bull, a man armed with a gun?

In Texas? Jesus, he'd be lynched! Why



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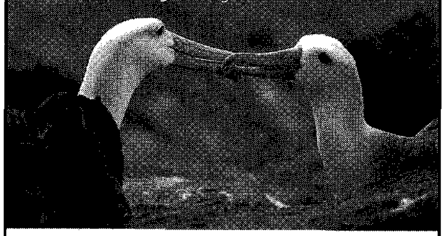

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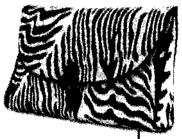

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had he waited until daylight to retrieve the weapon . . . to display it?

Johnny's warning interrupted my foggy groping. His words came in a lowered voice and with a kind of worried severity, and, to my surprise, were not about the Negro youth. "You see one, a big guy—"

"Who?"

"A railroad bull, for Chrissake. You gotta get down an' away fast. You woke up yet?"

"Yeah. What does he do? Wait for every freight that comes in?"

"No. But you never know when he's around. Loosen up. Stamp your feet, wave your arms. C'mon."

"Jesus, I had a helluva night."

"He won't give a shit about that. Loosen up." He moved his own arms in prompting, kept a steady gaze on the Negro youth.

Who smiled. "Yeah, man, y'gotta git ready to hightail it outa them yahds. What if he Texas Slim?" He allowed himself a gleeful chuckle. "He fast on his feet."

The freight slowed, slowed, jarred, came to a clashing stop, though we still felt in motion. Already the Negro youth had mounted the ladder and was climbing. Speedy and sure, his arm thrust back the hatch. Another rung upward and he heaved himself into open air; he sprang into daylight and disappeared. By the time I mounted the lower rungs, I could hear him climbing down the outside. And up, Johnny crowding behind me let the hatch fall back. Broad daylight. Blue dome of sky. Freight-car roofs in all directions. I had lived through it.

I jumped off the bottom rung down to the ground. But the Negro youth was tarrying there, and now I could guess, guess with a degree of certainty, at the same time oddly conscious that I felt no alarm. Standing between ramparts of brick-red and yellow freights, open gondolas, and tank cars, the brown youth in the small, earth-colored hat eyed us, me in particular, right hand in jacket pocket.

"Ah'm hungry, man."

"So're we," Johnny said.

"Sell you my boots, man." He pulled up his pants, bringing into view stockingless, lean brown shins above the edge of typical cowboy boots. "What y'all say? Sell 'em to yo' fo' jest a little money."

The thoughts that scurry through the mind: the whole proposition was preposterous. What the hell was he going to wear? And walk on this gravel? On streets? And in the cold? His wily eyes in his small head, watchful of every move, his wiry, quick body, ready for something, practiced, free and supple as a lynx. And a wickedly sharpened dinner knife hidden in his jacket pocket. And the two of us, yes, Johnny, shallow hard guy, and I, uncertain, untried, had to think of a way out of this, this emergency. Who the hell wanted his boots? He just wanted me to show some money. Forestall him somehow. Say O.K., and ask him how much, ask him to take them off. "Listen," I said solicitously, "you need those boots. How're you gonna get around?"

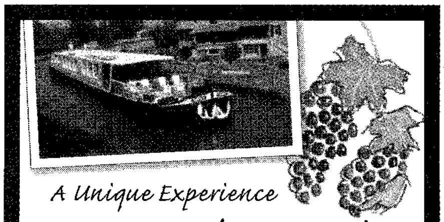
"Ah needs breakfas' mo'n ah needs these boots right now."

"Well, that's different. You'd be crippled without boots. Wait a minute."

Large-eyed, askance, and as sidelong as a profile out of Egypt, he watched me, the knuckles of his left hand bulging out the thin cloth of the jacket pocket. I fished into my topcoat. I knew there was a dime among the change there. I didn't want to show any more money than that. But I had forgotten the open Boy Scout knife. It nicked me. Strange, strange: collapsed into unimaginable density as they say happened to a neutron star, all my history seemed in that instant, all its tenets, its dictates. Johnny beside me became tense, as my fingers avoided the open blade and fished for the dime. "Here, keep your boots. Take this dime. Get yourself something to eat." I handed the youth the dime, conscious of Johnny's scowl.

"Thanks, man." Lissome again, he took the coin; or, rather, he accepted it, entirely without subservience or obligation, but with a short, triumphant laugh, turning, swiftly, strode jauntily away into the motley perspective between converging freights.

"What the hell'd you give him the dough for?" Johnny's tough visage grimaced. Under the visor of his cap his brow furrowed in a scowl; even his short body all but flapped in a spasm of wrath, so pronounced it gave one the impres-



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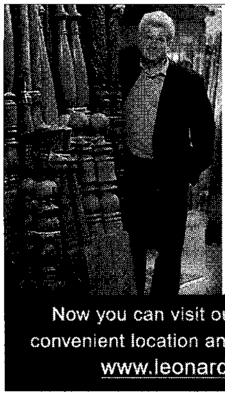

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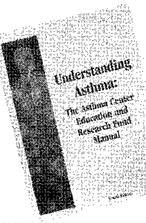

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sion of a ripple contrary to the wave, pulses contrary to his stride. We hurried toward a break in the double lines of freights. “We coulda took care of him.”

I couldn’t help but grin. “Maybe.”

“What d’ye mean, maybe? I wouldn’t let no nigger ride over me.”

“I know.” But my mind seemed to be sifting out something worth a minute’s consideration. A kind of insight: that wasn’t the way—this was the important thing—a Negro was supposed to behave. That was it: not the cocksureness, no; then what? A sense of equality, independence. Sure, he had deliberately displayed the weapon to cow us. Or he would have grabbed the dough and run. And he was fast enough to get away. O.K. Whatever. Was I imagining things? Was it really a sign of change? A new stance of the Negro, a new attitude. “It’s only a dime.”

Johnny seemed to be going through some kind of parallel evaluation, but one that reached an entirely opposite judgment: “Sure it’s only a dime. But you let him git the better of you, you let him git ahead of you.”

“Oh, balls.” I tossed my head. “Get into a fight with a guy with a knife. For a dime?”

“I told you we oughta git that cheese dagger away from him while he was asleep. You saw him.”

“Well, we didn’t. And now get your throat slashed for ten cents.”

“He never would’ve. If we jumped him together, never. If he’d knowed you had a open jackknife, he never would’ve tried it.”

“Well, it wasn’t open.”

“What for you got your finger scratched?”

“I don’t know. Must have done it some other time.” Johnny clawed the air in frustration.

“Jesus.” I tried to shunt the conversation into other channels. “He turned out of sight about here, didn’t he?” I leaned forward to squint ahead. “How come we can’t find it?”

“We’re comin’ to it. There. I can see the snubbers at the end o’ the tracks. Trouble is you Northe’ners don’t know niggers. You keep lettin’ ’em git more an’ more outa their place. They’ll git us all down that way.”

“O.K. I see it. Boy, look at those lines of freights behind us.”

“It’s El Paso. It’s a big junction.”

Grumpy with each other but trying to reach an accommodation of necessity, knowing that we had to, we let the subject drop. With Johnny leading the way, in silence, like a short bridge to the commonplace, we rounded the spring snubber at the end of a line of freights and tramped out of the yard up the incline to the blacktop highway at the edge. We were now off railroad property, out of danger, in the clear, a couple of grouchy, slouchy, seedy hobos walking by the run-down dwellings at the outskirts of El Paso. ♦

(*The above is adapted from the almost two-thousand-page unedited novel manuscript that Roth was working on in the early nineteen-nineties.*)

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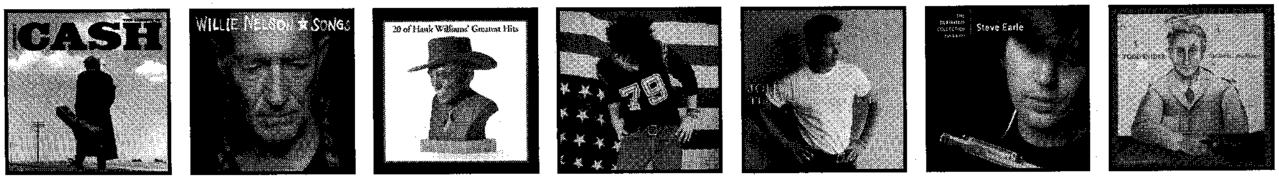

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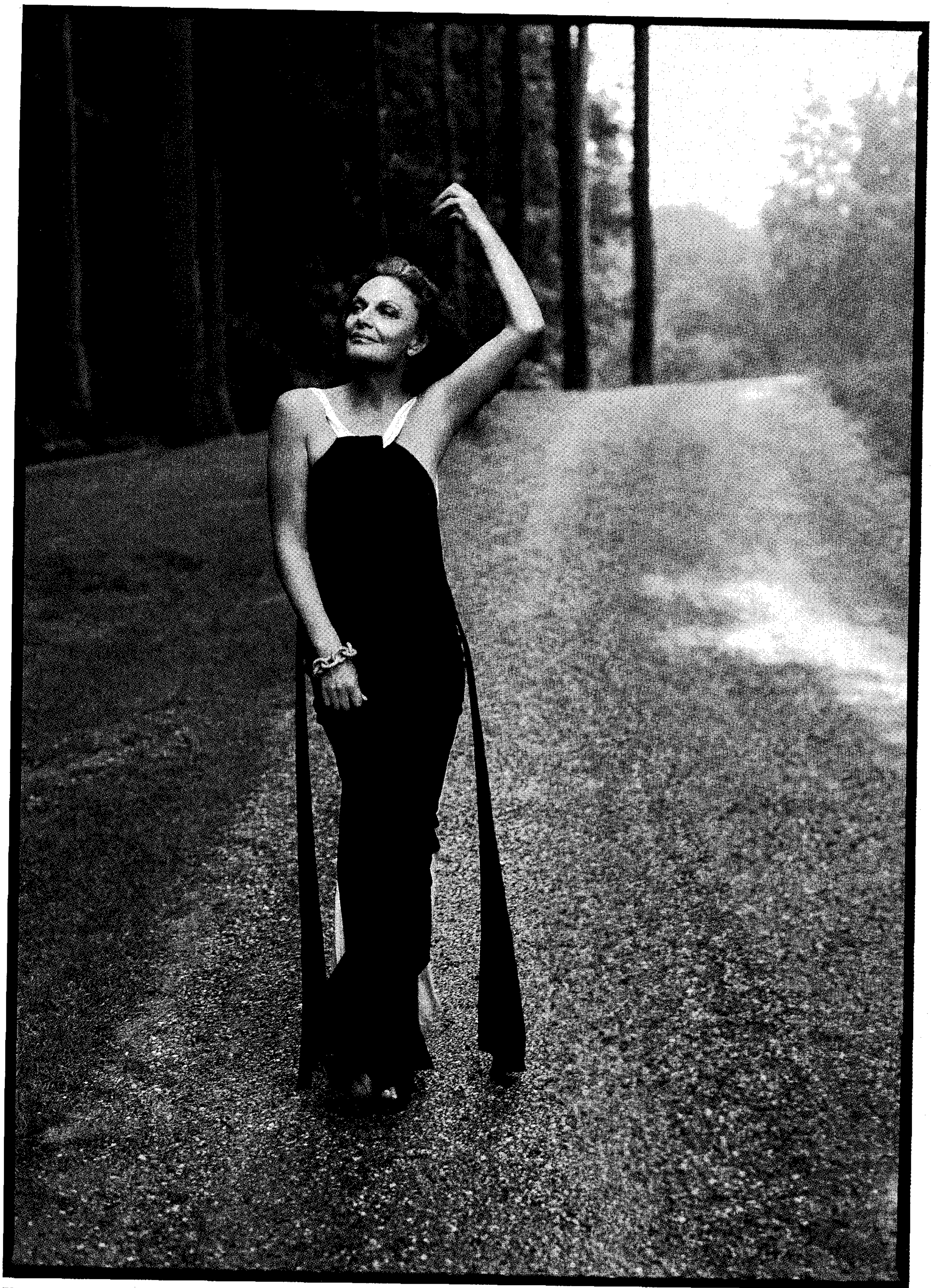


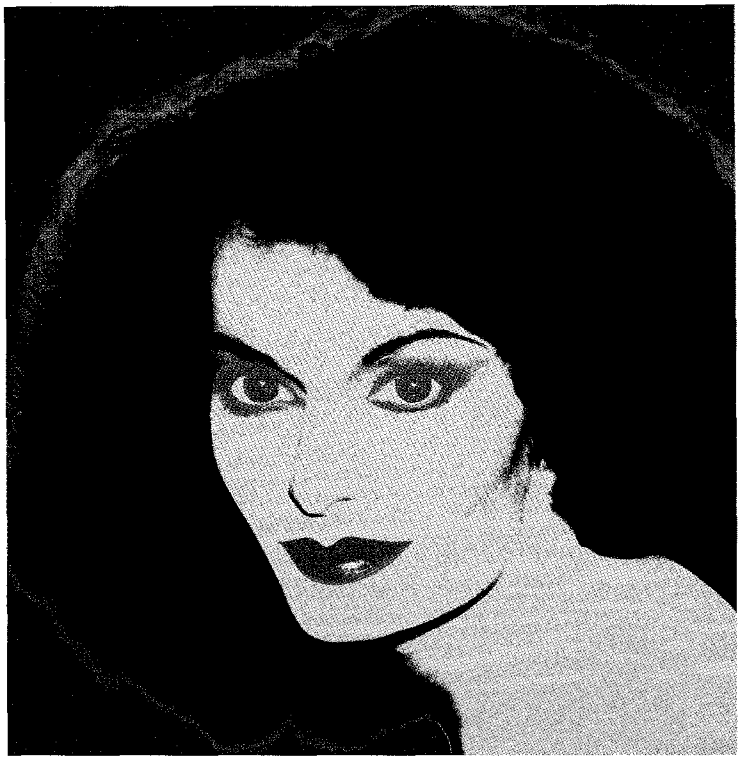
Von Furstenberg, photographed by Ruven Afanador at her Connecticut home, and, opposite, in a Warhol silk-screen portrait.

PROFILES

THE HUNTRESS

How Diane von Furstenberg became the DVF woman.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR



ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR VISUAL ARTS / ARS, NY / DVF STUDIO

There was a time in the nineteen-seventies when the American woman, many millions of her, wore, tucked into a private spot under the soft fabric of her collar, brushing against the rounded, protruding spinal bone at the nape of her neck, the name of a young Belgian émigrée, Diane von Furstenberg. The American woman had gone to a department store and stood in a small, bright space before a mirror. She had unbuttoned and tugged off her dull, stiff old clothes and dropped them in a pile on the floor, and then, stripped to her underwear, she had bound herself into a supple, silky, cleverly cut garment of vividly patterned jersey that felt smooth against her skin. It didn't seem to have any buttons or zippers or hooks anywhere—it just tied with a sash around the waist, like a bathrobe. It was very comfortable—quite sensual, in fact, all that soft stuff clinging to her. It was rather tight-fitting on the top, tighter than she was used to, and it was rather low cut as well. Could she get away with it? She could see, twisting around, that the dress showed the curve of her bottom. It was suggestive, but it wasn't indecent, she decided—she could wear it to the office. And somehow, inexplicably, it was flattering.

The American woman knew of the Belgian who had designed this unusual garment, the wrap dress, from looking at photographs in the society pages and from reading about her in the press. The Belgian woman was, despite her American-sounding story (an astonishing entrepreneurial success, founding her dress business at twenty-three, working very hard, on the cover of *Newsweek* at twenty-nine), alluringly, intimidatingly foreign. She didn't look like an entrepreneur. Photographs showed her with long, loose dark hair (at all times loose, never tied back) and Cleopatra eyes of lavishly painted color, looking boldly into the camera with a controlled half smile, her legs conspicuous since she was always wearing dresses and always in heels. She said gnomic, French-sounding things to reporters ("Woman are becoming too beautiful, too strong, but there's no other way to be. What do you want me to do? Go out to lunch? Find a lover? So what. What would it bring me?"). She was even—and it was this fanciful detail that toppled her out of reality altogether—a princess: there were pictures of her husband, the prince, an Austrian, in the society pages, too, a feral-looking blond man with large, carnivorous teeth. Above all, she was *feminine*, in a way that was as alien and mysterious to the sensible American woman as being a princess—a femininity that promised intimacy and seduction and yet, in its over-the-top, almost mythical quality, seemed somehow impersonal, as though it were a kind of timeless spirit that possessed female infants (foreign ones), setting them off on a life course that led from bewitching nymphet to Madame Blavatsky and wrought all kinds of thrilling damage in between.

The American woman bought the wrap dress and took it home. She found that she was wearing it all the time and received many compliments on it, so she went back to the store and bought another one, in a different color and print. She noticed that many famous women were wearing wraps, too, such as Julie Nixon Eisenhower and Gloria Steinem. That was fun. A few months later, she bought a third. But then she observed that several of her friends owned the same dresses, which was embarrassing, and she began to see herself on the street coming and going, and some women looked quite bulgy and unattractive in their wraps, which soured her on the dress a little bit, and anyway three was enough, so she didn't buy any more Diane von Furstenbergs. She hardly noticed when, in 1978, the dresses were put on sale at clearance prices and, shortly afterward, the company collapsed. The name Diane von Furstenberg was jostled to the back of her memory, along with other scraps and remnants from that period in her life.

Twenty years later, the American woman's daughter came home from college wearing a wrap dress that she had bought in a vintage clothing shop for two hundred dollars. Two hundred dollars for somebody's old dress! That was so extraordinary that the American woman was not surprised to read in the newspaper that Diane von Furstenberg had started up her business once again.

One steamy afternoon this summer, Diane von Furstenberg, aged fifty-nine, climbed into the back seat of her car to be driven to the showroom of Christian Louboutin, the shoe designer. She was going to select the shoes for the models to wear at her fashion show in September. She was dressed easily in loose beige linen trousers, flat sandals, and a very large gold chain bracelet of her own design. (In public, she always wears dresses and heels, but *en privé* she is casual.) On the way, she chatted on her phone (she speaks to each of her two children at least five times a day, and to her husband, Barry Diller, the media magnate, at least five times a day, and to her many close friends very frequently.)

Her hair was still long and loose, but curly—she has stopped straightening it—and a different color than it used to be, a rich henna rather than reddish-black. She was tanned a nineteen-seventies Brazil-nut shade of brown, from sitting outside at Cloudwalk, her estate in Connecticut, and from lying on her yacht. Her face was almost bare: she still loved the old gaudy paint, but women didn't wear that kind of makeup anymore and she preferred not to look ridiculous. She had considered cosmetic surgery but had so far decided to remain natural. Through yoga and hiking and eating carefully, she had maintained her figure. Her business the second time around was going even better than she had hoped—a hundred and twenty million dollars in wholesale this year, her clothes in Barneys and Harvey Nichols and Le Bon Marché, nine Diane von Furstenberg stores around the world. Soon she would open a new boutique in Saint-Tropez (and one in Tokyo in September), and the festival at Cannes, then sailing around Majorca in the yacht, then launching her jewelry line in London, then the Allen conference in Sun Valley. In August, she would visit her children at the hunting lodge in Austria that they had inherited from their father. She had three grandchildren. She felt wonderful.

Shoes, shoes, shoes. She and Christian Louboutin had become close friends a few years ago, and since then she had declined to wear any shoes but his, with their signature red soles. ("You are a prisoner of the red sole like I am a prisoner of the wrap," she liked to tell him. "On your grave there will be two little red soles.") Louboutin felt that they understood each other because she was so much a woman, and he, being the only boy in a family of four sisters, permitted in his childhood to overhear their female whisperings, understood women. "She is a *femme Orientale*," he says, meaning Orient in the old sense, the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. "She plays with her hair, she talks with her hands, with her neck. She is like a beautiful courtesan you would find in the novels of the nineteenth century. She is like a fragrance coming from the Orient, which means the opposite of a perfume with a lot of water." (Although she was born in Belgium, she is, in fact, somewhat Oriental in that sense: both her parents are Jewish; her mother was born in Salonika, in Greece, her father was born in Bessarabia and behaved like a Middle European—a loud singer of songs, a breaker of glasses.)

In Louboutin's studio, the shoes were perched in rows on glass shelves against a mirrored wall, most of them Marie Antoinette-ish in mood, with tiny straps and dainty buckles, sling-backs, pumps, sandals, mules, kitten heels, stocky heels, wedge heels, stilettos. Von Furstenberg (having kissed everybody hello) picked up a brown snakeskin peep-toe pump and examined it from several angles. She put it back. She mused over a beige sling-back with a mesh toe. She picked up a pink satin sandal with a kitten heel.

"This is very cute," she said. "I hate the heel, but I love the shoe." She couldn't stand kitten heels. Why make the effort to wobble around on a little spike an inch high? If you wanted to be comfortable, why not wear flats? And if you were going to wear heels, why not wear real heels that did something for your legs, not these stumpy little hoofs? There were several sorts of shoe she avoided on principle. Shoes with ankle straps, because of the unflattering way they bisected the leg, making the shin appear short and thick. Shoes with just a tiny scrap of fabric across the tip of the toe, which made a woman's foot into a pig's trotter. Worst of all were wedges. She was appalled by their ungainly, prosthetic appearance, yet she saw them everywhere—on the street, in stores, and even here, in Louboutin's studio, more wedges! What sort of woman would consent to such a graceless appendage?

Having collected a few shoes, she decided to try them on. The samples were all size 7 (it is thought that shoes look better in small sizes), and Louboutin employed a young assistant with size-7 feet who was available to model them, but von Furstenberg felt that she could get a good sense of a shoe only when she saw it on her own foot. She sat down on a chair and squeezed her size-8½ toes into a tiny pump.

"*La soeur de Cinderella*," Louboutin commented.

Louboutin was dressed like an archeologist, in a khaki safari shirt, khaki trousers, and pebble-colored suède lace-up ankle boots. He was familiar with von Furstenberg's preferences, but he did not accept them. He offered her a white linen espadrille with a six-inch wedge.

"Oh, it's too high," she said, pushing it away. "I'm sorry, but if you put these shoes on you look like an idiot."

A remarkable creature appeared in the doorway—a very tanned woman with very long, very blond hair wearing black satin hot pants, a very low-cut V-neck shirt, and a diamond-encrusted pendant in the shape of a heart. She recognized von Furstenberg immediately and beamed at her and Louboutin.

"My two favorite designers!" she cried. "I feel like I've walked into heaven!"

She explained that she was Kimberly Landau, proprietor of the CoCo Pari stores in Red Bank and Deal, New Jersey.

"Oh, Deal—with all the Sephardic Jews," von Furstenberg said dryly.

"We do phenomenal with your line," Landau told her. "Phenomenal."

"I like your shorts," von Furstenberg said, slouching back lazily on the sofa in her trousers and scrutinizing the tiny garment, which at first appeared to be a miniskirt. "When you walked in, I thought, Don't walk on your skirt."

"My skirt?" Landau asked, confused, looking down at her legs.

"It's a joke."

Von Furstenberg decided that it would unite her show if all the shoes were cork or gold, and she wanted to incorporate certain design elements to match her prints: she wanted an apple, a ladybug, a gingko leaf, and a bee. Apart from these motifs, however, there would be no color at all.

"All the feet are very neutral," she declared. "No pink. The whole thing looks like cork. Even the legs look like cork."

"Dress like a cork, feel like a cork," Louboutin mused.

"I want to make a cork bag," she said, in a burst of enthusiasm about the neutral feet.

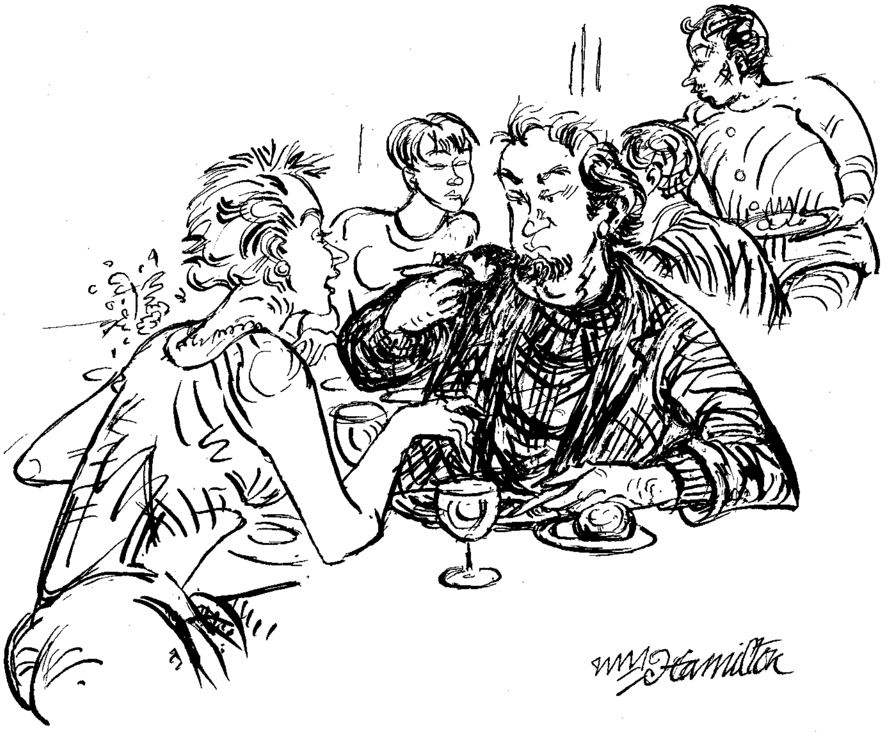
"No, no, *hor*-rible. Horrible," Louboutin said. "It always looks cheap. Ugly. The kind of thing you buy in the market in Toulouse. Horrible."

It is not an incidental fact that Diane von Furstenberg needs to look at shoes on her own feet. Her clothing and her company have always been inextricably connected to her person. Even now, the company finds that, in advertisements, old photographs of her work best. It promoted its Beach line with a photograph of her in Sardinia on her honeymoon, nearly forty years ago. There are no longer pictures of her face on the sales tags, but in the large building on West Twelfth Street that serves as her office and pied-à-terre in New York there are paintings of her everywhere. Every Diane von Furstenberg store, wherever it is in the world, has at least one picture of Diane von Furstenberg herself.

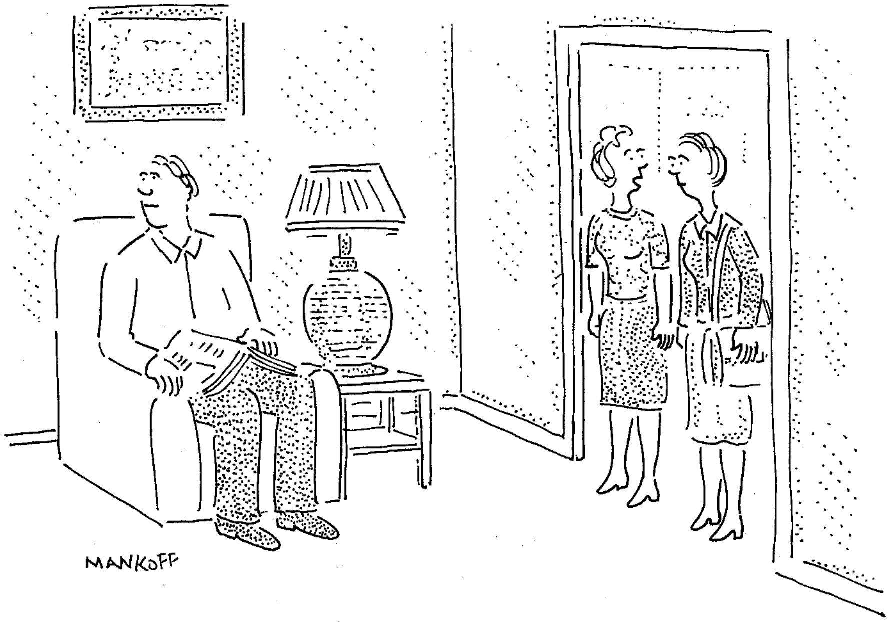
These days, it is not just her image that the company uses to convey the spirit of the clothes but also the story of her life. Over the years, she has honed this tale, in the countless talks she has given, in conversation with friends, in her memoir, in marketing presentations (who is the DVF woman today?), and there is now a standard version that she recounts fluently in which each stage of her life (starting with her mother, shortly before she was born) carries a lesson that she has learned. Although parts of the story are used for marketing, this story is not a cynical production: it is the way that she conceives herself.

It begins like this. In the spring of 1944, Lily Nahmias, aged nineteen, was arrested in Brussels and sent to a concentration camp. On the train to the camp she attached herself to a motherly woman, and, upon arrival, when the woman was directed to join the group on the left, Lily moved with her. The officer in charge of making selections (who Lily claimed was Mengele himself) forbade her to follow and ordered her to join the group on the right. At that moment, Lily believed that this was the worst thing that had ever happened to her, but in fact the officer had saved her life. She concluded later, and took pains to teach this to her daughter, that what first appears to be a catastrophe may be a blessing in disguise, and the person who appears to be your deadliest enemy may be your redeemer.

In 1945, Lily was released from Neustadt-Glewe, one of several camps in which she was incarcerated, weighing



"Oh, come on. You liked it fine before you found out this was a chain."



"He's a good man, but he's prone to reverie."

forty-nine pounds. Her mother fed her tiny amounts of food every few minutes until she began to recover. A doctor told her that above all she must not get pregnant, since she was unlikely to survive the experience. In November, she married Leon Halfin, her sweetheart from before the camps, with whom she had faithfully exchanged letters until her arrest. In a grand gesture, she used her reparation check from the German government to buy a fur coat. By the following spring, she was defiantly pregnant, and she gave birth to a healthy Diane on New Year's Eve, 1946. "My birth is a miracle," von Furstenberg says at this point in the story, "so that explains what I'm about."

Here, though, it is necessary to leave this version and fill it in a little bit. Lily met Leon Halfin around 1942 in Toulouse, to which they had fled after Brussels came under German control. Some time after that, Leon escaped to Switzerland. He didn't take Lily with him because he felt that since she was a Jewish girl he would have to marry her and he didn't want to get married then, so he took another woman instead. Later, he felt guilty about this, so he wrote to Lily and continued their courtship in letters, and eventually asked her to marry him, also in a letter. After the war, it took Leon several months to get back to Belgium, and by the time he arrived, in October, Lily looked almost normal—frail, but not the skeleton that she had been in June. He had also been in a camp, but a refugee camp in Switzerland, and he seemed not quite to understand the difference between his experience and hers. Leon and Lily stayed together for sixteen years and then divorced. Many years after that, one night in 1980, while staying in a hotel in Germany with her boyfriend, Lily was found crouched and mute under the concierge's desk and spent three weeks in a mental hospital. Then she "snapped" out of it.

Returning to the standard version: Lily did not permit her daughter to be afraid. When Diane was afraid of the dark, she locked her in a closet, and by the time Diane was let out she realized that there was no reason to be afraid of the dark. Lily also brought her up to feel that men, "*les pauvres*," were weaker than women—bumbling, a little dim. Leon adored Diane, smothered her with love, and thus, she says, forever freed her from romantic insecurity. ("Her father drove her crazy," Frederick Seidel, a poet and an old friend of hers, says. "He made her very, very uncomfortable, hemmed in, overwhelmed.")

She had a perfectly nice childhood, but she disliked being a child and detested not being allowed to take care of herself. Brussels was boring, and her hair was black and frizzy, not silky and blond like that of the pretty girls in school, and she felt very plain. (This, too, however, turned out to be a blessing, since, she realized later, if you are a pretty girl too young, you learn to rely on your prettiness and neglect other qualities.) She spent her childhood planning what she would do when she was grown and free. All of her plans amounted to becoming what she would later call the DVF woman. The DVF woman had it all—she was young, she was beautiful, she had many lovers, but she also had a career that made her independent of men. In business and in romance, she was always in control: she never waited for the phone to ring.

When Diane was young, her mother didn't often talk to her about the war, and, when she did, it was, von Furstenberg wrote later, "about little things, such as how much she had longed for a plate of spaghetti or how she had exchanged a piece of bread for a comb or how she had cut off the bottom of her dress to make a belt. They were almost boarding-school kinds of stories, not death-camp kinds of stories." Lily told Diane about the camaraderie in the camp, and about how she had worked in a bullet factory and made the bullets badly so that they would malfunction, and how one time she made a little doll that made the Germans laugh. "Lily emphasized to me how young she felt—that girls like her didn't even go shopping without a chaperone," the writer Fran Lebowitz, a family friend, says. "She'd come from this very sheltered upper-bourgeois life and had very little contact with even the normal world. She seemed to believe that life in a concentration camp would have been less shocking to someone else."

Von Furstenberg's favorite play is "Death of a Salesman"; she says that, having been a travelling salesperson herself, she identifies with Willy Loman. The comparison might seem absurd, yet in one sense she *is* like Willy Loman, in her refusal ever to accept that something bad has happened to her. She is ruthlessly upbeat. She is almost never angry. When something happens that appears to be bad, she convinces herself that it is actually for the best. "That is my process," she says.

"I always thought Diane and Lily were psychotically tolerant," Lebowitz says.

"I am immensely unforgiving, of much lesser slights than the Holocaust, but Lily wasn't a grudge holder, and Diane isn't, either. Diane is friends with all of her ex-boyfriends. She doesn't get mad, she doesn't get even, she just seems to ignore it." To remain angry with someone, after all, was never to be free of him.

Recently, after her mother died, von Furstenberg found a note among her papers which Lily wrote in jail the day she was arrested. She addressed it to her parents, and somehow it reached them. "My little Mommy and my little Daddy," she wrote. "Your little Lily is leaving. Where, she doesn't know. But God is everywhere, isn't he? And therefore she will never be alone or unhappy. I want both of you to be very brave and do not forget that soon—you have to stay very healthy because you have to be well for my wedding. . . . I don't know where I'm going but I'm leaving with a smile." Von Furstenberg found this note in the house on Harbour Island, in the Bahamas, where her mother spent her last years, and after she read it she walked down to the beach and into the sea. "I am the daughter of somebody who went to the camps with a smile, and that explains everything about who I am," she says. "It just does. If you were born a miracle, you've already won before you do anything. It doesn't matter if you become a jet-setter and marry a prince; for me the whole point is survival, because my mother was never a victim. She was never a victim, she never was a victim."

One Friday afternoon a month or so before Fashion Week, Nathan Jenden, the Diane von Furstenberg creative director, was conducting fitting sessions with Julie, the company's seamstress, in the garment district. Von Furstenberg doesn't attend all the fittings, but she likes to pop in when she can. She was in a good mood, still exhilarated from the day before, when she had flown to Washington to lobby for a bill that would extend copyright protection to fashion designs. She had expected that, with a war on in Lebanon, nobody would be available to meet with her on such a non-urgent matter, but she had been delighted to discover that this was not the case. "I must be famous because everybody saw me!" she crowed happily to Jenden, settling into a chair. "I lobbied! I saw McCain, I saw Hillary, Diane Feinstein, Nancy Pelosi, the two from Maine, one from Wisconsin. I didn't need any briefing, I was very good once I got going." (She loves to rally support for causes, which is one reason that she was so pleased recently to be elected president of the Council on Fashion Designers of America—a job that was not much fought over.)

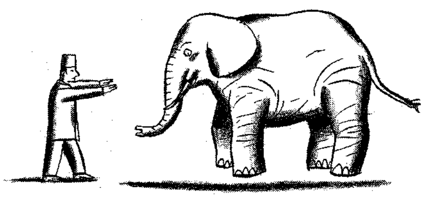
Jenden was bent over the waist of the fit model, tugging the fabric of her dress and inspecting the way it fell. The fit model was a tall young woman with a brown ponytail, a standard size 6. She was wearing an adapted wrap dress with a military air made from a khaki-colored nylon fabric that was new to the line. Jenden had explained to von Furstenberg on a previous occasion that the fabric was "very tech," and that it was necessary for a little light relief from the prevailing fashion mood, which was all about cotton and eyelets and being organic. She didn't understand what it meant exactly for a fabric to be "tech," but she liked the sound of it and repeated it several times. She rubbed the fabric between her fingers and thought it felt like parachute material, so she dubbed the dress the "para-wrap."

"Julie, I'm going to cut it up here, and I think we'll need to straighten this," Jenden said.

"Yes, just a little," von Furstenberg agreed, leaning back and watching him languidly.

"Safety pins? Thank you."

Jenden has been working for her for five years. When she first called him up and asked to meet him, he had no idea who she was. He remembered seeing her name in some tabloid, possibly *Hello!*, but he realized later that he'd confused her with Ira von Fürstenberg, her former sister-in-law, a socialite and onetime B-movie star. Jenden was a Europe snob and a fashion snob. He had studied at the Royal College of Art, in London, and worked for couture houses in Paris. Von Furstenberg was vague about what she wanted her clothes to be like—she told him she wanted to expand beyond dresses into a line of sportswear—but it was clear to him that they wouldn't be particularly hip, and they certainly wouldn't be couture. He told her he wasn't interested, but she persisted. She called him again and again for a year. He found that he liked her. She read a lot and caught his Godot references. He saw that she wasn't really a designer and so not likely to interfere with him too much. And he was impressed by the fact that, despite her being older than his mother, he found her extremely attractive. He succumbed.



These days, although she attends fittings and makes suggestions, for the most part she functions as Jenden's muse. Each season, he thinks about her and what she represents and comes up with clothes that embody that: always easy and comfortable, a little bit naughty, never prissy—which, in Jenden's mind, makes the line quite European. "American fashion still revolves around Jackie O., and there was no one prissier," he says. "All across America there are women wearing sleeveless above-the-knee shifts in a myriad of horrific colors." Von Furstenberg clothing is the opposite, he believes: nothing that holds its own shape, nothing tweedy or thick, nothing stiff, nothing complicated to put on or awkward to walk in. One season, for instance, he decided that their theme was going to be Russia. "It's *so* DVF," he told her. "The fur, the attitude, something a bit dark about it. I'm thinking a big fur collar with your curly hair, I'm thinking bright red for the little wrap dress because bright red is a good color, but we haven't seen much of it, it's very eighties and there's something eighties about you, and it's kind of like the revolutionary army."

What von Furstenberg really cares about is the prints for her fabrics. She is quite passionate about those, and Jenden has learned that it is best to defer to her in this area. "She'll be, like, 'Don't you love what I've done with the prints,' " he says, "and I'll be, like, 'That's nice, love, but you need to give me one that has some black in it, because what color are my trousers going to be? I cannot have bright-pink and hot-green trousers. I can't. It's nasty.' And she will say, 'What about a pair of green crochet

Feel like a woman,
Wear a dress'
Diane Von Furstenberg

Clockwise: Von Furstenberg at twenty; with Egon von Fürstenberg, in 1969; a 1987 drawing; with Calvin Klein and Bianca Jagger, in 2003; her first advertisement.

trousers?' And I'm, like, 'Diane. Diane.'" Many prints derive from photographs she has taken (she is constantly taking photographs): she will take a picture of a plant or an animal and then blow up a tiny section of it and repeat that detail—the twigs of a tree, for instance, or the mottled skin of a frog.

"Where is Jas?" she asked Jenden after a moment, shifting in her chair. "I want to see him."

Jas was an intern and the son of an old boyfriend, so she was keeping a motherly eye on him. (She loves to keep a motherly eye on people.) Jas had vanished from the office the day before, at eleven in the morning, in the company of a female intern, and nobody had seen them since.

"He is *disparu*," Jenden told her.

"I think he's having an affair," von Furstenberg said, eyes narrowing.

"With the doctor's daughter," Jenden said.

"The doctor's daughter!" she cried. "Oh no! She's about fifteen! And *very* cute. Are they O.K.?"

She opened her cell phone and called her assistant. "He disappeared with a cute intern," she said animatedly. "I guess they're having an affair. Nobody has seen them since. I don't know, just find out where he is."

"We're going to have a pocket inside the fold here," Jenden said to the seamstress.

"This is going to be really cute," von Furstenberg said, closing her phone.

"And you have to stitch it here," he continued. He turned the model around and pointed to the place in the cleavage where one side of the wrap crossed over the other. "And I want a tab here. Everywhere I go, I see girls wearing a pin there. So let's try to figure that out."

"How about a little Velcro?" von Furstenberg asked.

"I want a little button," Jenden said. "A little tab, with the button on the inside of the garment."

She frowned. A button at the cleavage was antithetical to the whole idea of the wrap—it was supposed to be a dress that you could throw on or off in a moment without fussing over stupid little fasteners. (She dislikes hardware in general and instructs her designers to avoid it whenever possible. She particularly hates zippers—she believes that dresses should be removed without making a sound—but recently she has been compelled to permit them, since many of her customers have silicone implants, and those cannot be compressed enough to allow their owner to wriggle into a tight bodice.)

"Do a snap," she conceded. "But the tab is altogether not going to work. You don't need it. So what, they show their tits."

DONALD STAMPFLI / COURTESY DVF STUDIO; REG GRAY / WWD; JON MATTHEWS / COURTESY DVF STUDIO; THEO WARGO / WIREIMAGE; ROGER PRIGENT / COURTESY DVF STUDIO

With her parents and her brother, in Belgium; with Yves Saint Laurent, in New York; a 1985 portrait; with her husband, Barry Diller, in 1993; a photograph for Vogue, in 1974.

COURTESY DVF STUDIO; PETER ZACHARY SIMIN / WWD; MICHAEL VOLLBACHT; ANNIE LEIBOWITZ / CONTACT PRESS IMAGES; BOB STONE / COURTESY CONDÉ NAST ARCHIVE

Jenden moved on to a red sleeveless dress whose skirt puffed out and then cinched in at the knee with a drawstring. The fit model pointed out that the drawstring needed to be elastic.

"Why?" von Furstenberg asked.

"So you can walk," Jenden said.

"But that's not true," she protested. "I'm sorry, but that's the whole point. It should *not* be elastic, because you have to have a little constraint. You have to have a little agitation. Can anybody ple-e-ease bring me a glass of water? If you had elastic, you would miss all the mystery."

Diane knew when she was a child that she wanted to be the DVF woman; what she hadn't figured out was the details of the career that would get her there. But she knew she wanted to go to America—that was part of the fantasy, maybe something to do with the big American cars that her father drove—so when she received an invitation from a prince she knew to visit him in New York, she got on a plane right away. She had met the prince—Eduard Egon von und zu Fürstenberg, known as Egon, the son of an Austrian prince and Clara Agnelli, an heiress to the Fiat fortune—in Geneva when she was eighteen. She had spent her teen-age years in boarding schools, in Switzerland and England, finding love first with a boy, then with a girl, and ended up taking classes in Geneva at a secretarial school and at the university. She and Egon had seen each other for a while back then.

She stayed with Egon in New York for two months, trying to figure out a way to remain there on her own. She attempted to be a model, but when that failed she decided to try her hand at design. She remembered that a man she had met in Cortina owned a knitting plant; she flew from New York to Italy and offered herself as his apprentice. A couple of months later, though, she discovered that she was pregnant. She sent a telegram to Egon, who was off on an around-the-world tour, suggesting that she get an abortion; he wrote back instructing her to organize a wedding immediately. She did so, basing its style on the country feast in the movie "Tom Jones," which had recently come out. Lily didn't mind that her daughter was marrying an Austrian, but Egon's father, Prince Tassilo, was surprised. "This is the first time in nine centuries that we have Jewish blood," he later told *New York*. "But Jews are clever and shrewd, and the little boy will need that." He came to their wedding but left before the reception. Egon understood. He arranged for a young woman to entertain him in his room.

After the wedding, Diane and Egon

lived in a large apartment at 1155 Park Avenue and went out all the time. They received several invitations a night, many from people they had never heard of. "There was hardly a party or opening that we didn't go to," she wrote later. "Appearing at four or five cocktail parties, a gallery preview, two dinner parties and a discotheque in one evening was routine." When they weren't going out, they gave parties to which everyone came—Andy Warhol and his crowd from the Factory and *Interview*, Paloma Picasso, Loulou de la Falaise, Giorgio di Sant'Angelo.

Meanwhile, during the day, she tried to get her dress business off the ground. Two months after her first child, Alexandre, was born, she managed to get an appointment with Diana Vreeland, the editor of *Vogue* (she had met her socially, through Egon). She put together a tiny show for Fashion Week, 1970, in a suite at the Gotham Hotel. People came because they had heard of her, but they bought the dresses because they thought they would sell, and they did. They were simple shirtdresses that tied at the waist, priced, at eighty-six dollars, for working women with a little money to spend. "Everything was fur and leather and uneven hemlines," von Furstenberg said. "No one was making a little bourgeois dress. So I did."

She had no company yet, just herself. She used her dining room to store inventory, and when shipments of dresses from Italy arrived she went to the airport to sort them into packages for individual stores. She got pregnant again three months after Alexandre was born, and she was back at the warehouse a week after the birth of her second child, Tatiana. Things were going well, but she was anxious all the time. "I'm afraid that one night I'm just going to stop living," she told a reporter. "She worries," Egon told the same reporter. "Oh, she worries. . . . Death worries her terribly."

After a couple of years, she decided that she had to become more professional, so she took a showroom on Seventh Avenue and hired a salesman. She felt that he didn't really appreciate her product, so she had a couple of shirts made up for him in the same material that the dresses were made of. When he felt that fine, soft stuff next to his skin, she says, he understood. Then, in 1973, she invented the wrap dress, and within a year or so she was selling fifteen thousand a week. She licensed her name to every sort of product from sunglasses to suitcases, and those were selling, too. Even to her it felt a little crazy, a little out of control.

However successful she became, she never saw her clothing as art. She was not a sculptress of cloth. What interested her were the emotions that clothing could produce in a woman. She believed in the alchemy of the fitting room: that magical moment when a customer suddenly saw in the mirror an entirely new creature: sexy, confident, feminine, bold, oh very sexy and yet completely professional at the same time—the DVF woman. Thus, the slogan that she wrote on her very first advertisement, in 1972, a photograph of herself in a shirtdress sitting on a white cube, and that has attached itself to her ever since: "Feel like a woman, wear a dress." (She has never had any interest in designing for men: she is not a man, she doesn't know how it feels to be a man, it is just not her thing.) All women are the same, she liked to say—when you got them in the fitting room and stripped off the outer shell, they all had the same fears and needed the same assurances. Hadn't she herself started out a plain little frizzy-haired Belgian and ended up a fabulous tycooness? She loved being a woman, and she could help other women be like her.

This was the fantasy she nurtured in the seventies as she flew around the country on countless early-morning flights to Cleveland or Atlanta or Chicago or Miami on her way to make personal appearances at department stores (this was her Willy Loman period). She worked hard, following customers into fitting rooms and tying the belts for them (tighter than they would have done), arguing with the older ones or the fatter ones to give the dresses a try (sometimes tight is more flattering than loose). She wasn't silly about it, but it did become a bit of a mission for her, this remaking of the American woman. In 1976, she published her first book, which she called "Diane von Furstenberg's Book of Beauty: How to Become a More Attractive, Confident and Sensual Woman." This was her manifesto. "The greatest natural enemy of women is insecurity," she wrote. "The toughest job in the world is to be a complete, happy woman." She wrote about how she had learned to dress well (so that she felt feminine and pretty), to eat well (with discipline but also with pleasure, preparing attractive trays for herself with beautiful china), to exercise (unhurriedly, sensually, alone, in a dark and perfumed room). She counselled self-love, but not of the flabby, indulgent kind. "You have a choice," she wrote. "You can do nothing and accept yourself as you are. Or, you can choose to reshape your body, color your hair, even have plastic surgery. Know what you want and find out what can be done." (She has always realized that in order to be spontaneous and free it is necessary to plan and calculate. "How I pack explains how I live," she says. "In order to pack well, you have to visualize what you are going to do, where you are going to do it, and how you are going to project yourself. People always say, 'Oh, it'll end up well.' No. You have to think about it.")

What this added up to was giving herself—as all women should give themselves—the attention and love that she needed (one friend calls her, affectionately, a "radiant narcissist"). "The relationship that counts most in my life is the one I have with myself," she says. "Sometimes I just talk to myself. I have a great, great, great relationship with myself, and it gets better and better as I get older. The other day, I was talking to Barry in the car and I said, 'I am so glad I'm me!' "

The DVF woman believes that love is more important than money (though she always has money anyway), and von Furstenberg's romantic life has always been a part of her legend. She had an affair with Ryan O'Neal just after "Love Story," and with Richard Gere in the era of "An Officer and a Gentleman." When she fell in love, as she did often, she gave herself to it completely. In 1980, she met a Brazilian on the beach in Bali who wore sarongs and hadn't worn shoes, he claimed, in ten years; for the four and a half years she was with him, she, too, wore only sarongs, even in New York, even in the winter. (She didn't lose her business sense, however—she used a love poem that she wrote to him as the advertising copy for Volcan d'Amour, one of her perfumes.) In 1984, she met an Italian novelist; she gave up her business in New York, moved to Paris to live with him, and, because he disapproved of her New York clothes—the leopard-skin prints, the teetering heels—she took to wearing flat shoes and tweed skirts. She consorted with writers and helped start a small publishing company. ("The first time I saw her, she was in the Café des Flores with Alberto Moravia, at the little table on the left just under the clock, which was the chic table," Bernard-Henri Lévy, the French writer, says. "She provoked a real impression, on a man in particular.")

She thought of herself as Diana the Huntress. "Do you love me? Have you forgotten me?" she was always saying, pretending to pout. She was part of the crowd that made Studio 54 what it was. One day, she stopped by to pick up her friend Jann Wenner, the editor of *Rolling Stone*, for lunch; when he noticed her scrutinizing the framed magazine covers in the lobby, she told him she was counting the people she'd slept with. "My God, she was a very flashy chocolate sundae," Diller says. "I mean, my God!"

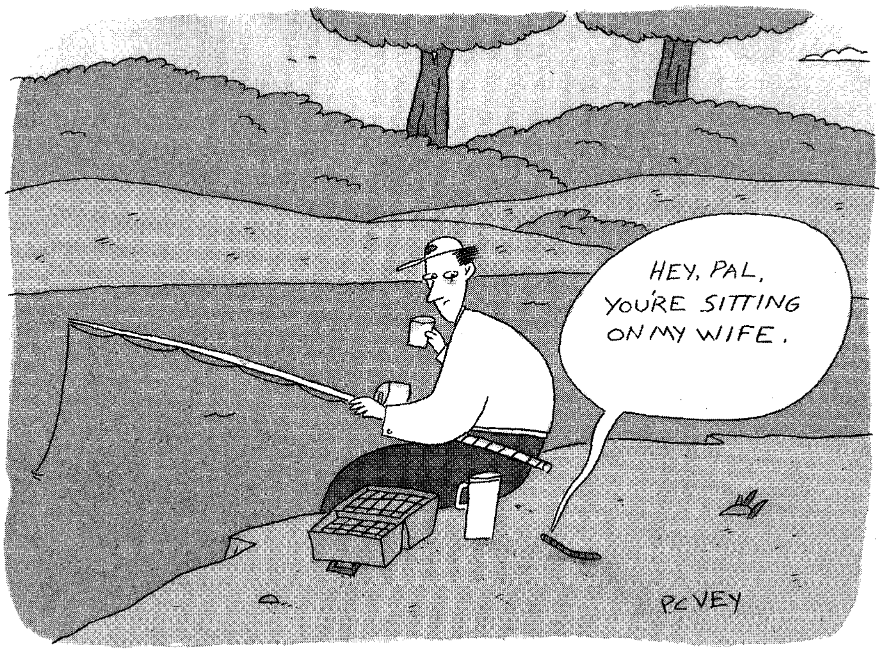
The story of how she became Diana the Huntress is complicated, but the most obvious turning point came in February, 1973, with the publication of an article about her and Egon in *New York*. The article consisted mostly of louche remarks from both about the state of their marriage. "You just live once," Egon told the writer, "and I am getting the most out of it. After a while, passion—you know—cools. So a little here, a little there at three in the afternoon. What harm?" "We don't take anything very seriously," Diane said. "The only way for a relationship to survive, I think, is to have no sex at all. . . . Passion after a while . . . pfffft. I mean, does it excite you when your left hand touches your right?" Diane told herself that the article was actually a blessing, because it revealed to her how her life looked from the outside. The marriage, she decided, was a sham, and they ended it.

Shortly before she and Egon separated, she met Diller at a party. "Egon said to me, 'Your pants are too short,' " Diller says, "which I never forgot because he was Egon, and he had great style. But later I went to a dinner in her apartment, and I knew when she said goodbye to me that something utterly inexplicable was happening." Diller found her dazzling. "I was really a Beverly Hills kid, and here I was with this capital 'E' Euro," he says. "Now, I wasn't chopped liver, I was the chairman of Paramount at thirty-three, I wasn't a shoe clerk, but Diane was Diane! I was not on the cover of *New York* for seven years!" During a five-year period in which Diana the Huntress gave way to, as von Furstenberg liked to think of it, Tycoon and Tycooness, they led an exceedingly tycoonish existence. Once when they were at loose ends in Hong Kong for a weekend, they decided to call up Imelda Marcos, whom they'd met in New York, and visit her in the Philippines, and while they were there they stopped by the mountain set where Francis Ford Coppola was filming "Apocalypse Now." "We fell madly in love," von Furstenberg says of that period. "But I was a young tycoon, I had an apartment on Fifth Avenue and a house in the country, and I was pretty and rich and wanted to have fun. I left him—not nicely. But he was always there."

Little by little, in between her romances, she began going on holiday with Diller again, with her children, and gradually it came to seem to her that they were married in all but name. He wanted to marry her properly, but she couldn't make up her mind—hadn't she made that mistake already? Could she be married and truly free? Could she be married and truly DVF? Eventually, as his fifty-ninth birthday approached, nearly thirty years after they met, she suggested they go to City Hall, but it took her some time to come to terms with her new state. "Marriage is for some reason not true to who I am," she says. "It took me a year to accept it, or to say 'my husband.' "

Three days before her runway show last week, von Furstenberg wandered from room to room in her headquarters. In the conference room, the show's stylist was holding a casting call for models; every two minutes, another tall girl with a stony expression on her young face stomped once up and down the room to demonstrate her walk. On the floor lay a pile of new DVF handbags, including a hefty one, two and a half feet wide, that von Furstenberg, in defiance of Louboutin's counsel, had had made out of cork. Across the hallway, two tailors were making last-minute adjustments. An assistant presented her with a mock-up for the show's program which consisted of a large photograph of her naked, her breasts covered, Eve-like, with tresses of hair (the new collection was titled "All About Eve"). "This is nice, but it's embarrassing," she said, smiling. "People will write things about it. Make it not so big."

Shortly before lunch, she sat down at her dining table with Jenden, trying to


HEY, PAL, YOU'RE SITTING ON MY WIFE.
PC VEY

sum up, in words that could be used in a press release, the story and the symbolism of the collection, whose theme was renewal in spring.

"Metamorphosis," she said. "For some reason, I think the word 'metamorphosis' is very important for this collection. How does the worm—no, not a worm—just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly…"

"Yes, it's all about Ovid's metamorphosis," Jenden continued, "but we're not going to talk about Ovid."

"Kafka wrote a metamorphosis," von Furstenberg said.

"Yes, but that's a giant cockroach, we don't want that one."

"It's the change, just as the caterpillar becomes the butterfly…"

"The DVF woman evolves like an insect through the spring season, eventually unfurling her chiffon."

Von Furstenberg got up to fetch some water, knocking over an ironing board that somebody had left in the doorway.

"We'll have to figure out this metamorphosis," Jenden called to her. "Chrysalis! 'Chrysalis' is another word."

"No 'Christ,'" von Furstenberg called back. "No!"

"Not 'Christ,' 'chrysalis'—isn't that what they're in? The cocoon?"

"Oh, O.K." She came back in carrying a tray of bottles and glasses and sat down.

"It's taking nature and making it look modern, a little Pop-arty, a little DVF—something to do with oversize or microscopic, kind of honey-I-shrunk-the-kids," Jenden said, thinking of the way they had blown up tiny images of frog- and snakeskin to make their prints.

"A little bit of 'Alice in Wonderland,'" she said, following his thought, "even though I hate 'Alice in Wonderland.' First, there's the light and the shadow, and then you have the leaf coming out, and the snake, and the butterfly, and the bee. O.K., that's it."

THE LOST SUITCASE

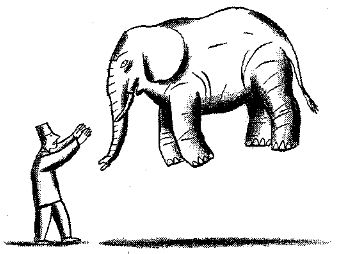
So it was with the suitcase left in front
of the hotel—cinched, broken-locked,
papered with world ports, carrying what
mattered until then—when as you turned your back
to cup a match it was taken, and the thief,
expecting valuables, instead found books written
between wars, gold attic light, mechanical birds singing,
and the chronicle of your country's final hours.
What, by means of notes, you hoped to become:
a noun on paper, paper *dark with nouns:*
swallows darting through a basilica, your hands up
in smoke, a cloud about to open over the city, pillows
breathing shallowly where you had lain, a ghost
in a hospital gown, and *here* your voice,
principled, tender, soughing through
a fence woven with pine boughs:
Writing is older than glass but younger
than music, older than clocks or porcelain but younger than rope.
Dear one, who even in speaking are silent,
for years I have searched, usually while asleep,

Among the archived memorabilia that von Furstenberg keeps in the basement at Cloudwalk—forty years of diaries, racks of old clothes, rolls of fabric, her letters, her parents' letters, press clippings (her photograph albums, dozens and dozens of them, are upstairs; she loves to feel nostalgic)—are several shelves of videotapes labelled "HSN." On these are recorded her appearances on the Home Shopping Network in the late nineteen-nineties selling Silk Assets, a line of cut-rate clothes that she put together specially for sale on television. She appears on the shows wearing this clothing—the vast satiny shirts, the elastic-waisted and billowing trousers, all vividly colored (daffodil, sunset, periwinkle, sea foam). Here she is, for instance, in the studio at nine one morning in 1998, following an advertisement for "Cats," selling her Chinoiserie collection.

"It was surprising this morning, because I put it on, and it really is quite elegant," she is saying to the hostess, perched on a stool, a little blurry on the old videotape, smoothing the complicated shirt she is wearing. The shirt incorporates three different patterns: pink and green flowers on the collar, navy-blue paisleys on the main trunk, and, on the long part that hangs over the wearer's bottom, a wide border of giant tentacled paisleys in Head & Shoulders blue. "Silk is a noble fabric," she says. "It is a fabric that people have fought and died for. And it takes color so well. With an outfit like this, you can go anywhere, you can be invited anywhere, and it is washable."

The camera shifts, and von Furstenberg appears on the studio's small stage next to the models. "How do we call this?" she says, looking down at herself. "The big shirt? It is very, very interesting because if I want to put it inside my skirt"—here she tucks it in—"I have a very pretty but very subtle and very tailored look, but if I want to put it outside"—here she pulls it out of her skirt again and gestures toward the giant paisleys—"I have a completely different and much more dramatic kind of shirt. So actually this is a fantastic collectible piece: one shirt and so many ways to wear it." The hostess is beaming. "I can't say enough about all the versatility as Diane has pointed out for you," she says. "It is the crêpe de Chine that Diane is known for, and if you use your Home Shopping Network card you can enjoy this without worrying about payments until February of 1999."

The first time von Furstenberg toured a home-shopping studio, in 1992—QVC, where she first entered the busi-



when I have found the suitcase open, collecting snow,
still holding your vade mecum of the infinite,
your dictionary of the no-longer-spoken,
a commonplace of wounds casually inflicted,
and the slender ledger of truly heroic acts.
Gone is your atlas of countries unmarked by war,
absent your manual for the preservation of hours.
The incunabulum is lost—both your earliest book
and a hatching place for your mechanical birds—
but the collection of aperçus having to do
with *light laying its eggs in your eyes* was found,
along with the prophecy that *all mass murders were early omens.*
In an antique bookshop I found your catechism of atrophied faiths,
so I lay you to rest without your Psalter,
or the monograph wherein you state your most
unequivocal and hard-won proposition:
that everything must happen but to whom doesn't matter.
Here are your books, as if they were burning.
Be near now, and wake to tell me who you were.

—*Carolyn Forché*

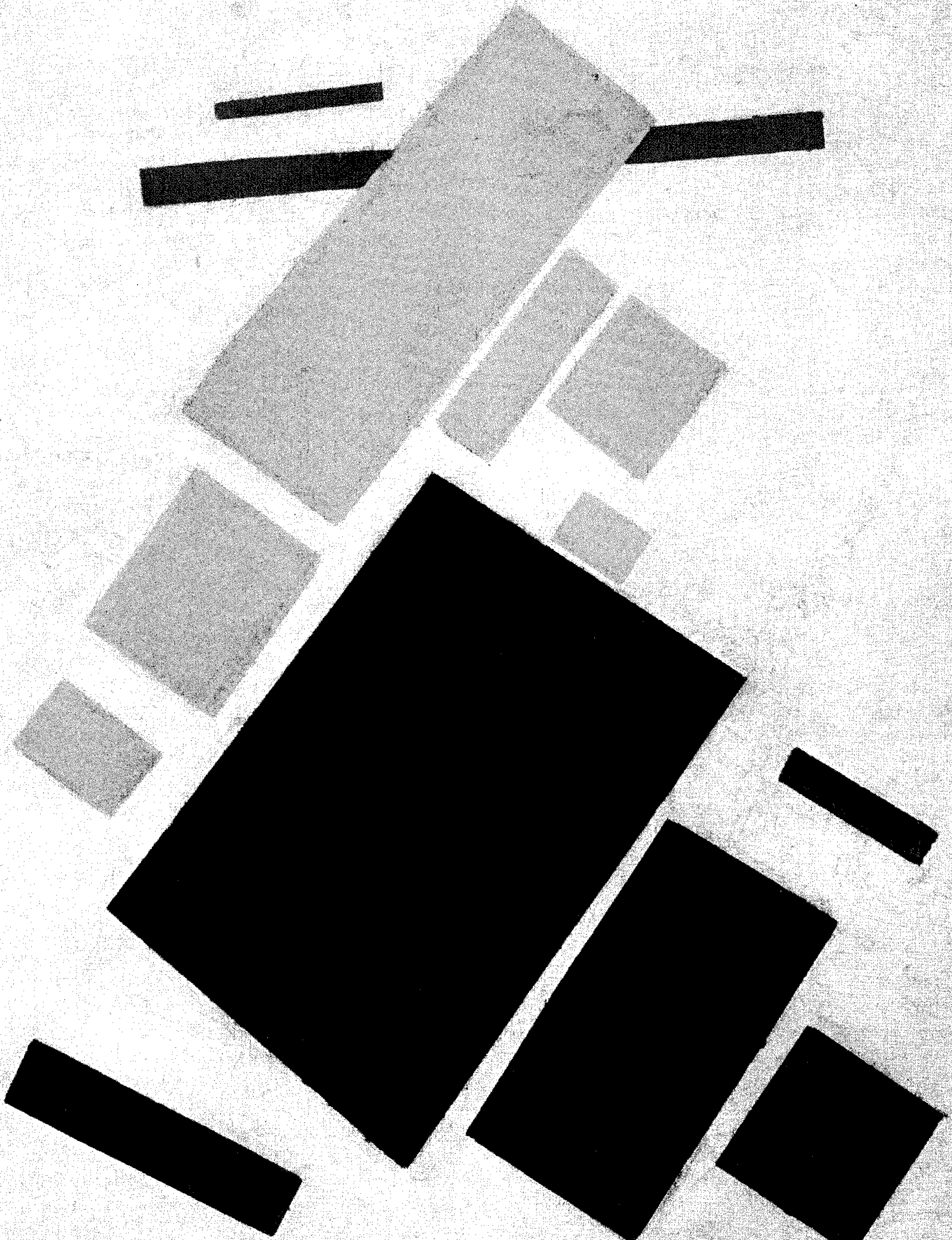
ness; HSN came later—she knew at once that she wanted to be a part of it. Susan Lucci, the venerable soap-opera star, was on the air selling hair products when von Furstenberg arrived, and as she watched the monitors Lucci's sales figures went up and up and up until they passed six hundred thousand dollars. It was mesmerizing. She knew that some people considered QVC to be tacky, but who cared about that? People also thought Sears was tacky, but Sears had been very good to her when she was designing a furniture line for the company in the seventies. ("I never pretended I was a fabulous designer," she told a reporter in 1976. "But my dresses are what stores are making money on, and that's what counts.") Television was really just a more powerful means of doing what she had been doing all along in her personal appearances: talking to women about her clothes and their feelings and why buying her clothes would change their feelings for the better. QVC already had forty-two million viewers—how could she not succeed? Barry Diller thought the network so exciting that he was thinking of buying it (he later did). All those people who thought she was a has-been would be forced to admit that she was back.

It had been nearly fifteen years since her first dress business failed, and she had had to crawl, slowly and humiliatingly, out from under a staggering amount of debt. Even when she was away in Paris, she had been aware of how trashy her name had become, licensed to far too many products of dubious quality. Now she set about the laborious process of buying her name back from every one of the merchants who had licensed it. Far from being embarrassed about her new venture, she was immensely proud. "I was astonished," Frederick Seidel says. "She would say, 'If you feel like it at midnight, take a look,' and you would see her there like someone telling you you should get a G.E. stove." (She never worries about decorum. When she goes to fancy events, she takes a little camera in her purse and snaps photographs of famous people like a paparazzo. Egon never worried about decorum, either: more enamored of fashion than she was, he started out in the industry as a buyer for Macy's and later designed plus-size women's clothes for Upim, a mass-market Italian chain store. He licensed his name to various spinoffs, such as the Prince Egon von Furstenberg eau de toilette.)

She made her QVC début in November, 1992, and on her first show she sold out her entire collection, $1.3 million worth of clothing, in two hours. It was thrilling. She was really good at it. She started doing shows all the time. Once she sold more than two thousand pairs of trousers in less than two minutes. She has since cut her ties to Silk Assets, but her old customers remember her. They post chatty messages on the HSN Web site. A customer, "c," from Kansas, for instance, wrote recently of the silk knit sweater with crochet trim, "i really like the navy collection especially this style of top. i think i have gained weight because around the shoulders didnt drape well. if you are lady with a large horns you might consider going up a size. . . . i really enjoy watching you diane on tv."

On New Year's Eve, Diane von Furstenberg will turn sixty. She always prepares herself for significant birthdays a year or two in advance, and this one has given rise to reflections about what will happen to her business after she is gone. She wants to make sure that it becomes something, she says, that people will love forever. "How do I pull myself out?" she asked a consultant she had hired to consider this question. "When there is not me, the first stage of me, and even the second stage of me, how does it go into the future?"

She has given the matter a great deal of thought. She thinks that perhaps her company should ease away from using her full name and substitute the less intimate, more iconic DVF. That will be the first step. Then the story must follow the name: she must find someone or several someones to replace her in the company's promotions, not models but real women, DVF women—an alluring anthropologist, a voluptuous violinist, someone like that. In sum, the company must stop being about her life and start being about those intangible, beautiful, undying things that she represents. If the American woman has learned anything from her, she feels, it is that she can be a woman and live a man's life: she can be on her own and never be lonely, she can care about money, she can have all the lovers she pleases, she can marry or not marry, she can start a business and wear a dress, she can be truly free. Now all that remained for her, Diane von Furstenberg, to do was make sure that the American woman's daughter would never forget. ♦

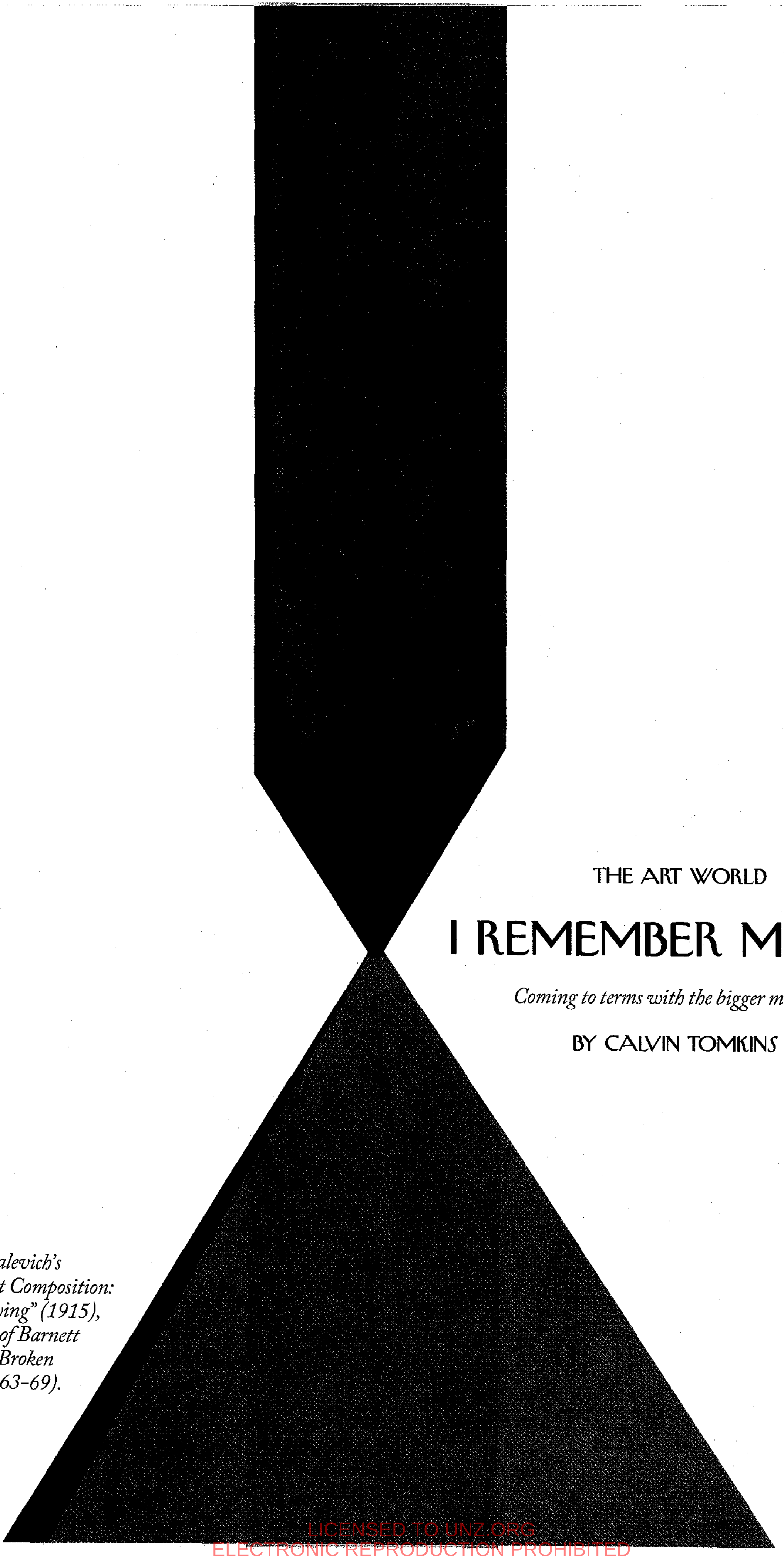


THE ART WORLD

I REMEMBER MOMA

Coming to terms with the bigger museum.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

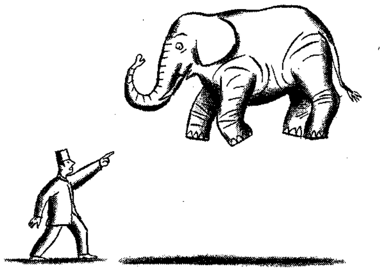


Kazimir Malevich's "Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying" (1915), and a detail of Barnett Newman's "Broken Obelisk" (1963-69).

In the late nineteen-forties, when I was just out of college and living in Manhattan for the first time, one of the reasons for being here was the theatre. Many of my friends went to ten or more shows a season, and when we got together we talked about theatre, not movies. But then, gradually, we stopped going. Rising ticket prices may have been a factor, or better movies, or the inevitable drift to the suburbs, but in retrospect it seems to me that we just lost interest. A few years ago, I asked a well-known Broadway director what had caused the legitimate theatre's decline as the primary cultural attraction here, and his answer surprised me. A new audience had moved in, he said, made up for the most part of out-of-town people who were not regular theatregoers. Their relative indifference had changed the mysterious chemistry of what happened onstage.

This admittedly élitist notion occurred to me one day last spring, when I was spending an afternoon at the Museum of Modern Art. The museum was very crowded, as it usually is now; attendance at most New York museums still lags below what it was before September 11, 2001, but MOMA's last year was 2.5 million, just under the record, registered in 2004-05, the museum's first year in its totally renovated and expanded new quarters. Although the expansion greatly increased the museum's exhibition space, the galleries often feel congested. The vast, amiable crowd drifts slowly through them, holding up digital cameras or mobile phones to photograph the pictures (this is allowed; flash photos are not); about one in six people is glued to a handheld audio guide. People converse in Russian or French or Japanese—between thirty-five and forty per cent of the visitors now are foreign, according to the museum's surveys. The crowd appears to be having a fine time and feeling very much at home in this sleek, supremely elegant new MOMA. I did, too, when it first opened, but now I don't. I'm feeling confused and disoriented. Paintings I've loved for fifty years look different to me here—less vivid, bereft of that essential jolt of surprise which you can get again and again, if you're lucky, from the same arrangements of line and color on a flat surface. Could this, I wondered, be the theatre syndrome in another form? Was the museum's new, expanded audience to blame?

A number of people have come down pretty hard on the Museum of Modern Art since it reopened, but none of them, to my knowledge, have blamed the spectators. Some fault Yoshio Taniguchi, the Japanese architect, for providing spaces that, in the fifth- and fourth-floor galleries given over to the museum's permanent collection of painting and sculpture, are said to be exquisitely refined but monotonous, and on the second floor, which is devoted almost entirely to contemporary art, hugely overscaled. Others argue that Taniguchi gave the museum's trustees exactly what they wanted, and that the result is cold, impersonal, and—the ultimate term of opprobrium—corporate. "At MOMA the unruly juice of art history, the chaos, contradiction, radicality, and rebellion, are being bleached out," the art critic Jerry Saltz wrote in the *Village Voice* last year. "Instead, we're getting the taming of modernism—modernism as elevator music." "MOMA has never looked so uptight as in this stupendous new space," Ada Louise Huxtable, the dean of architectural criticism in this country, wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*. The most intemperate blast was a cover story last February in *The New Republic*, by Jed Perl, whose designated villain was neither Taniguchi nor the trustees but Glenn D. Lowry, MOMA's director since 1995. Lowry has received much credit for managing and pushing through the museum's prodigious building project, whose total cost, which included moving the collections to a converted staple factory in Queens for two years, and returning and reinstalling them in the new building, was eight hundred and fifty-eight million dollars. Weathering the catastrophe of September 11th, which briefly stopped construction, Lowry brought the building in on time and on budget. (Not entirely on time: the east building, which will house the education department, library and archives, and offices for the curatorial departments, was delayed so that the exhibition galleries could be ready for the museum's seventy-fifth birthday, in 2004; the new building is now nearing completion, and will open in November.) In Perl's judgment, however, Lowry's main achievement has been "to stifle a debate about the transformation of what was once a chaotically creative institution into a well-oiled business-model museum," a museum whose interests are now fixed on "the needs of the tourists and the trustees." Lowry, Perl concludes, "has left the Museum of Modern Art's artistic mission on life support."



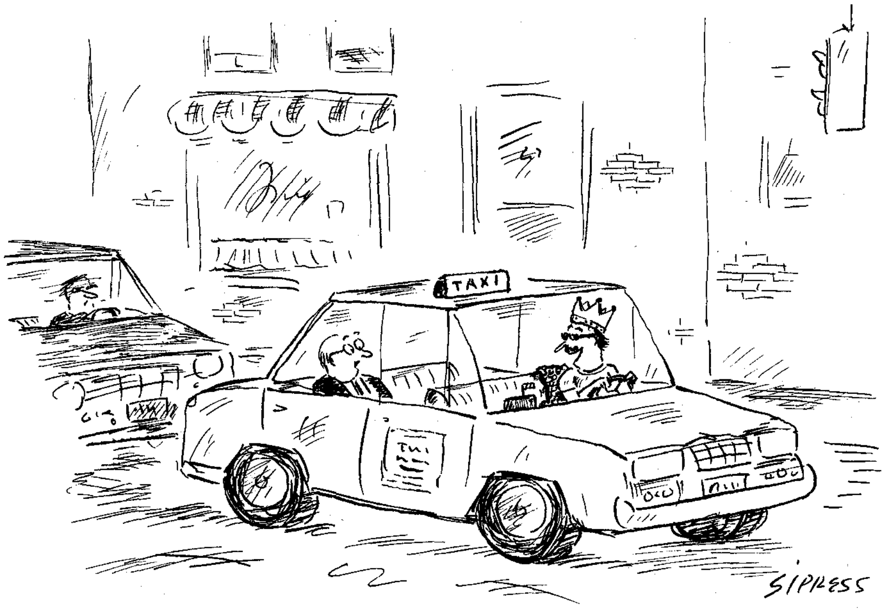
Ever since the museum opened, in 1929, art critics have accused it of betraying its (and their) trust. In the seventies and eighties, they complained that the museum's view of modern art was too narrow, that it left out too much in its telling of a story that began with Post-Impressionism and continued in a more or less unbroken line through Fauvism, Futurism, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, and the other main "ism"s up through Pop and Minimal art, in the sixties. The MOMA curators have taken a more complex and nuanced overview in recent years, but the story is no longer being told the same way in the new building, or with the same narrative coherence, and so a lot of visitors (including some critics) feel they've lost their bearings.

MOMA has always evoked intensely personal and somewhat erotic emotions in people, nostalgia being one of them. Many of us grew up there, in the sense of awakening to a world of visual shocks and mental options that we hadn't run into anywhere else. Gertrude Stein was wrong when she said you could be a museum or you could be modern, but you couldn't be both; MOMA was both, and to me this made it much more exciting than the theatre. Nostalgia, as it affects recent criticisms of the museum, can be set aside for the most part—we all long for the MOMA of our youth (MOMA mia!)—but it intensifies more specific criticisms.

One involves the permanent collection, a treasure house of twentieth-century art whose depth and quality are unmatched anywhere in the world, but which is said to be poorly served in the new building. A lot of artists say this.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: COURTESY MOMA; BARNETT NEWMAN FOUNDATION/ARS, NY

Frank Stella, whom MOMA has blessed in the past with two retrospective exhibitions, is quite outspoken on the subject. "On one level, the building is not so bad," he said to me recently. "On the other hand, what is it? It functions, but it functions as some kind of—this is overdoing it—some kind of entertainment center, I suppose. But the reality is that sandwiched somewhere in the middle of that building is what the building is all about, which is the collection. It should be the pulse of the museum, but it's not presented in any particular way. There's not enough change of scale in the galleries, and the crowdedness is reinforced by that spatial homogeneity. The feeling never changes—the spirit is gone." Another artist whose career MOMA has done much to advance—one of the many who declined to be quoted—said that the reinstalled collection "just seems defanged and sanitized and lukewarm. The story is not so compelling to me."



"In my own country I didn't drive a taxi."

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Many people, artists included, complain about the perfunctory, "one of each" installation on the fifth and fourth floors, and about the absence of any visible demarcation between primary and secondary works. In the old MOMA, certain works—Cézanne's "Bather," Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignon"—were hung alone on a wall, to signal their supreme importance in the historical development of modern art; here both these landmarks hang alongside other paintings in a long row. The power and influence of the Modern is so immense that very few art-world insiders want to go public with their criticisms, but there is plenty of off-the-record griping about recent de-accessions (two de Chiricos, a major drawing by Pollock, one of Picasso's 1909 Horta de Ebro paintings), recent exhibitions (the first big show in the special-exhibition galleries, on the sixth floor, featured a corporate collection, part of which was being given to the museum), and what is viewed as an ominous absence of fresh curatorial initiatives.

The other main area of complaint has to do with the decision, by Lowry and his colleagues, to devote primary attention—and the whole second floor of the museum—to contemporary works. Critics and artists have often castigated the museum for paying too little attention to recent art; now that there's so much of it on view, the complaint is that it's being handled badly—"Out of Time," the current contemporary group show, was skewered by the *Times'* critic, Roberta Smith, as an "unusually sterile" combination of "the obvious and the arbitrary." Another prominent artist told me recently, "I feel very dispirited when I go there and see the same twenty names that have been in every group show all over the world. There's a catchphrase for the way you assemble and make juxtapositions in art and music now: 'It's the mix.' The Modern just doesn't do that very well. It's like a white hip-hop producer who doesn't know much about hip-hop." The second-floor galleries don't make this job easier. Their twenty-two-foot-high ceilings are inhospitable to small or medium-sized art works, and nobody I've talked with has a good word for the colossal, second-floor atrium, whose walls, pierced here and there by windows, rise a hundred and ten feet to the sixth (top) floor of the museum. The atrium, which Taniguchi conceived as a vertical, indoor counterpoint to the museum's beloved outdoor garden, also serves as a space for large dinners and public events and as a unifying orientation point for the whole museum, but so far it has managed to overwhelm and trivialize Monet's "Water Lilies," Rauschenberg's recently acquired "Rebus," and just about every other work the curators have installed there. The one exception has been Jennifer Bartlett's 1976 "Rhapsody," a room-girdling assembly of nine hundred and eighty-seven painted metal plates, which held its own in the atrium for two months earlier this year, and held out hope that curators and artists will eventually find ways to harness the atrial beast.

Glenn Lowry has said that he takes all criticisms of the museum seriously, and the museum has responded to some of them by changing the installations in several galleries. Some curators feel that the critiques have been churlish and overly personal, and nearly all the senior staff people, Lowry included, say, in effect, give us more time. "Building projects are like tsunamis, giant waves that take over everything," Lowry said last spring. "I want to have time with the curatorial staff and the senior support staff to step back now and say, 'What have we achieved, and what do we need to do over the next five years?' We've got fifty thousand more square feet of exhibition space, and we're far from understanding how to use that space well, or to what degree some galleries work and others don't. On the other hand, I think the collection has never looked better."

We were sitting in the director's

Lowry (center) and his curators: John Elderfield (painting and sculpture), Connie Butler (drawings), Steven Higgins (film and media), Deborah Wye (prints), Kynaston McShine (curator at large), and Peter Galassi (photography). Photograph by Steve Pyke.

sixth-floor office, a spacious rectangle whose windows overlook the garden. Lowry had on a gray suit, a checked shirt, polished loafers, and lavender socks, his signature style note. (Until two years ago, when Boston won the World Series, the socks were fireman red.) Fifty-one years old, lean and very fit (he works out a lot, and takes hundred-mile bike rides on weekends), Lowry projects a gracious, tough-minded competence leavened by a zest for his job that does not conform to any corporate models I know. He was born in New York City, but when he was seven his parents moved to Williamstown, Massachusetts; they were both avid skiers, they wanted to be closer to the mountains, and his father, an engineer, had found that he could work just as well up there. Lowry himself became an expert and intensely competitive skier. His prowess on the ski team at Holderness School, in New Hampshire, led to a winter in Europe with a squad of future prospects for the United States team, but he decided that to compete at that level would mean giving up too many other things, and he quit racing when he entered Williams College. The college is famous for incubating future museum directors; the list includes Earl A. Powell III (the National Gallery), Thomas Krens (the Guggenheim), and Michael Govan (the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). Lowry's moment of conversion—he had been leaning toward premed studies—came early in his freshman year, in Professor Milo C. Beach's course in Indian and Islamic painting. The first slide flashed on the screen showed a sixteenth-century Safavid painting from the Shahnameh, or Book of Kings, and it made Lowry decide that he wanted to study art. "All I knew at that moment was that I'd found something utterly mesmerizing," he recalls.

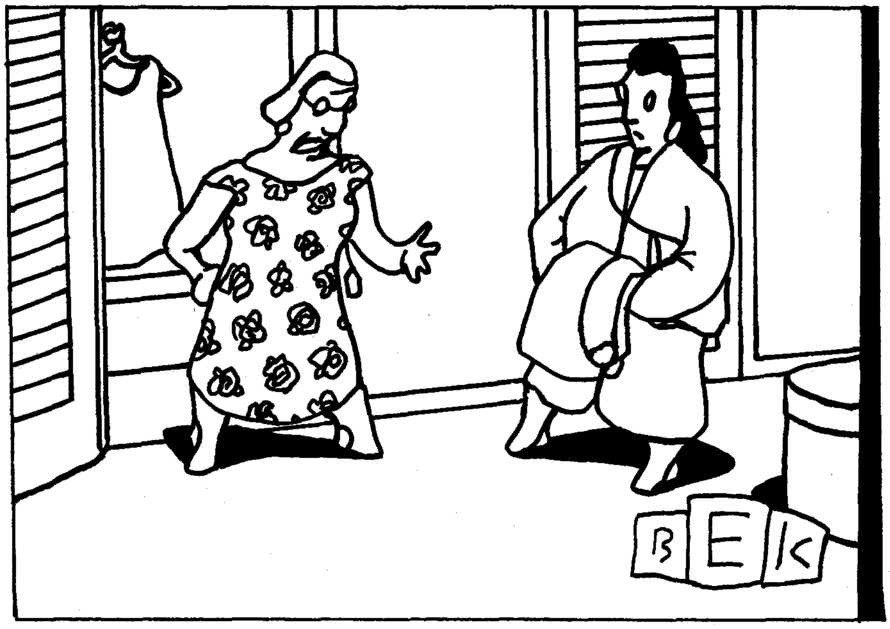
After graduating from Williams, in 1976, he went on to Harvard for a Ph.D. in Islamic art and architecture. He was assistant curator at the Fogg Art Museum for a while, and married his college sweetheart, Susan Chambers, who is now a landscape designer; they have a daughter and two sons, the youngest of whom graduated from Holderness last spring. Early in his career, Lowry was the director of a small museum at the College of William & Mary, in Virginia, and then a curator at the Freer & Sackler Galleries, in Washington, D.C., from which he was summoned, in 1990, to become the director of the Art Gallery of Ontario, one of Canada's leading museums. During five years in Toronto, he completed a major expansion project that prior to his arrival had run out of money and stalled. His resolution of that crisis, which involved laying off more than half the museum's staff—he says that he was eventually able to hire most of them back—must have impressed the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, who, in their quest for a new director, had been turned down by several highly respected museum people, and who, by 1994, had decided that they needed someone younger to take charge of their own, far more ambitious expansion project. Lowry, at forty, welcomed the challenge. As he informed me, with a sunny smile, "Anxiety is what agrees with me."

Before Lowry took the MOMA job, in 1995, the museum's trustees and curatorial staff had made several basic decisions. The first involved a question that has come up periodically in the museum's history: Does modern art have a cutoff date, and, if so, should MOMA stop collecting and exhibiting new material, and concentrate on being the great showcase for twentieth-century art? Debates about postmodernism in the eighties had reactivated this notion, but Kirk Varnedoe, the brilliant and charismatic head of MOMA's department of painting and sculpture, argued persuasively against it. In his view, modern art was a continuing story. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the museum's founding director and guiding spirit, had located its origins in the work of Cézanne and other Post-Impressionist painters in the eighteen-eighties, and, as Varnedoe once wrote, "No rift of equal profundity and scope has occurred in the visual arts" since that time. Another argument was over splitting the museum—keeping the building on Fifty-third Street for the historical (pre-1970) collection, and buying another one (a large building on Tenth Avenue was under consideration) for new art and large loan shows. The Tate Gallery, in London, had followed this course, keeping its historical collections in the building on Millbank, and renovating an abandoned power station across the Thames for its contemporary program. Once again, Varnedoe's voice was influential. With John Elderfield and several other curators, he argued the value of seeing contemporary art within the context of great works of classical modernism, where the dialogue between them could shed light on modern art's evolution. Varnedoe also made a strong case for the museum's fourth major expansion (the others were in 1951, 1964, and 1984); MOMA's collections and its public had grown to such a point, he said, that it could no longer fulfill its mission in the existing space. At any rate, by 1996 the trustees had decided that the museum would keep moving forward, and that—having worked out a deal to buy and demolish the nearby Dorset Hotel and two adjacent brownstones—it would do so in a much larger building on the same site.

Lowry proved to be a dazzlingly effective C.E.O., someone who could deal firmly and decisively with the countless obstacles that confront any major building project in Manhattan. "I just think we struck gold in Glenn Lowry," I was told last spring by David Rockefeller, the honorary chairman of the museum's board, who took a primary role in negotiations for the expansion. (Rockefeller's support, cemented by close personal ties and at least one joint retreat at the Bohemian Grove, in California, has been a crucial Lowry asset.) What the board hadn't quite counted on was that Lowry, in consolidating the power he needed for the job, would also bring about significant changes in the highly unbusinesslike culture of the museum. The Modern had never been run by a strong C.E.O. Alfred Barr was fired by the trustees in 1943 because of what they considered his administrative shortcomings and his eccentric tastes in art. Barr, whose shy manner and tendency to put off difficult decisions belied his strong will, refused to leave; he continued to guide the place through a combination of sublime intelligence, moral authority, and the supple maneuvers of René d'Harnoncourt, the official director from 1949 to 1968, who once said that his essential function was "to preserve and nourish the genius of Alfred Barr." Since Barr's time, real power at the museum had been shared by two groups: the board of trustees and the heads of the six curatorial departments that Barr established—painting and sculpture, drawings, prints, photography, architecture and design, and film. The board hired and promptly fired the two directors who followed d'Harnoncourt, in part because both of them tried to tamper with the delicate balance between these elements. The trustees' next choice, Richard Oldenburg, served very effectively for twenty-two years, and his success was due, in no small part, to a quiet, low-key managerial style that deferred to the ambitions and needs of the head curators. Under Oldenburg, powerhouse curators like William S. Rubin (in painting and sculpture), John Szarkowski (photography), and Arthur Drexler (architecture and design) reigned supreme in their fields, and were treated like feudal barons within the museum. John B. Hightower, one of the two short-lived directors after d'Harnoncourt, wanted to fire Drexler but found he couldn't because Drexler had such powerful supporters on the board of trustees. European dealers and museum people sometimes introduced Rubin as the director of the Museum of Modern Art, an understandable mistake and one that Oldenburg seemed to find amusing.

David Rockefeller, in his autobiography, noted another factor in the trustees' decision to hire Glenn Lowry: "Because he specialized in a very different field of art history, Glenn was not a threat to any of MOMA's curators." It quickly became clear to the curators, though, that Lowry was going to do things differently. Oldenburg had dealt individually with the chief curators, but Lowry called a lot of meetings, with all six curatorial departments represented by junior as well as senior staff. "When I got to the museum, I discovered that I was the only person who actually knew what each department was acquiring," Lowry told me. "Drawings didn't know what prints was acquiring, prints didn't know what paintings was acquiring, and they were often getting works from the same artist." Lowry made it clear to me that the boundaries among the six departments had been eroding before he came, but one of his priorities was to speed up that process, and also to "rebalance," as he put it, a system under which painting and sculpture, whose holdings and whose share of exhibition space vastly outweighed those of all the other departments combined, was so much more than a first among equals.

"I don't think anyone would argue with the fact that, within this family of departments, painting and sculpture is the primary one," he said to me. "What Barr gave birth to, though, was an institution in which photography, film,



"It looked cute when I saw it on someone pretty."

media, architecture and design, and prints and drawings all played critically important roles. I have a responsibility to the whole museum. Maybe some of the criticism that's been voiced is criticism that comes when there's a rebalancing." Recent art, with its proliferations of mixed media—paintings based on photographs, video projections as sculpture, three-dimensional drawings, architectural "environments"—seemed to support a more interdisciplinary approach, and many of the curators welcomed the increased collegiality that this entailed. "It's not as if the strong and independent curatorial voices in each department have changed," Lowry said. "It's just that they're at the table talking to each other about what they intend to do, and that creates a very different kind of dynamic."

To Kirk Varnedoe and others in the department of painting and sculpture, though, what seemed clear was that Lowry was undermining their authority and their autonomy. Varnedoe had been selected by William Rubin to run the department, just as Rubin had been chosen by Barr. The line of aesthetic descent was part of the museum's DNA, as they saw it, and now it was being blurred. At meetings of the board of trustees where acquisitions were presented, the custom was for the head curators to come in and say something about major works. Varnedoe was very upset when that custom lapsed during the reconstruction process, according to his widow, the artist Elyn Zimmerman. (Varnedoe died in 2003.) Lowry says that it never really lapsed. His recollection is that for a period of two years or less, because board meetings took place outside the museum and no art works could be brought in, the curatorial presentations were shorter and less frequent. In any event, listening to Varnedoe talk about art had been one of the delights of board membership for many trustees, some of whom began to suspect that Lowry's competitive drive might be at war with his collegial ambitions. "Glenn doesn't just want to win" was one reported comment. "He wants you to lose."

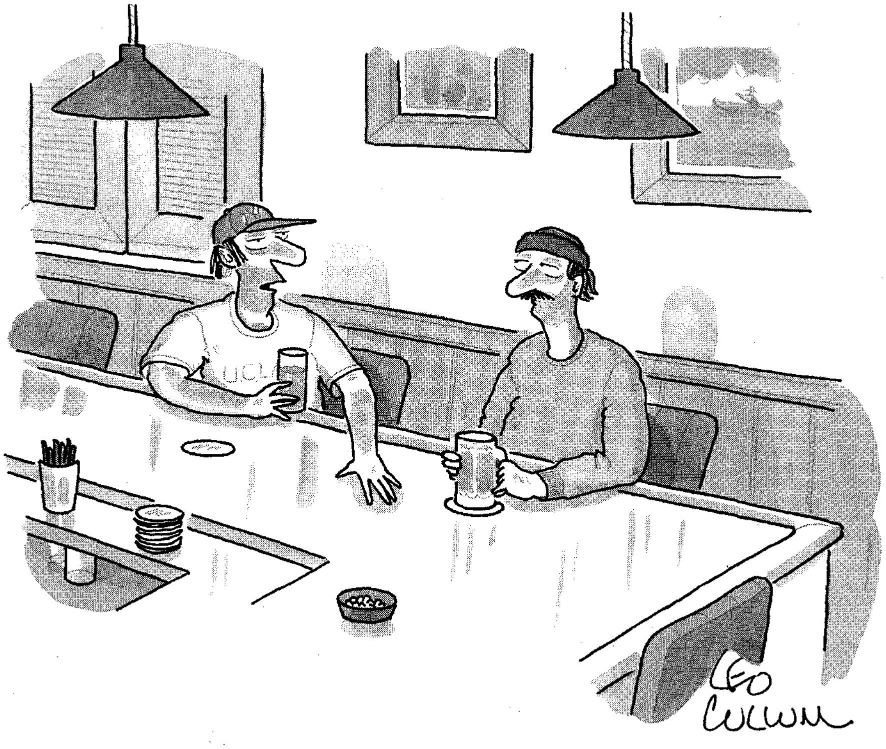
Varnedoe and Lowry got along well at first. Before Lowry came, several trustees had asked Varnedoe to consider taking the director's job himself; he had thought about it, and decided that he would rather concentrate on what he loved, which was scholarship, writing and lecturing, and making exhibitions. He liked and respected Lowry. They had both gone to Williams, they both loved competitive sports (Varnedoe had played varsity football at college), and, as Lowry said to me last spring, "I admired Kirk enormously." By 2001, though, Varnedoe felt he was no longer being allowed to do the job that Rubin had passed on to him. The overriding issue for him was the rehanging of the permanent collection of painting and sculpture in the new building. Varnedoe and the other chief curators had worked closely with Taniguchi on the design and layout of their new galleries, and for the last year Varnedoe had been forming and refining his ideas for the reinstallation. The chance to present the collection in more depth, to tell the synoptic story of modern art with greater complexity and variety than the old galleries had allowed, was tremendously important to him, but now he was being told that Glenn Lowry wanted a final say on the rehanging.

"I don't think Dick Oldenburg would ever have had a conversation with Bill Rubin about hanging his galleries," according to Jennifer Russell, who has worked closely with four New York museum directors (Thomas Armstrong and David Ross, at the Whitney; Philippe de Montebello, at the Metropolitan; and now Lowry, who made her his deputy director for exhibitions). "A lot of MOMA curators have spent most of their careers here, so Dick was the only director they'd known. But Glenn is a different animal—he'll want to have a conversation about it." Russell implied that this was all he wanted—that, in order to fulfill his role as an activist, highly involved director, he felt an obligation to be in on the discussion. "Kirk and I got to be close friends," she said, "and I tried to persuade him that Glenn was never going to tell him how to install the galleries. At any rate, the conflict with Glenn was not the only reason he left." In the spring of 2001, Varnedoe had a recurrence of colon cancer, which had been in remission for five years. Many of his colleagues believe that this influenced his decision to leave the museum, a few months later, but Elyn Zimmerman says that he would "absolutely" have left in any case. He spent his last two years at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton. A memorial service for him was held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2003, and the list of speakers, chosen by Zimmerman, did not include Glenn Lowry.

John Elderfield, who was named chief curator of the department of painting and sculpture in the spring of 2003, is unlike either Varnedoe or Lowry. A soft-spoken, sixty-three-year-old Englishman who came to work at MOMA in 1975, he has organized many of the museum's most admired exhibitions over the past three decades, including the great Matisse retrospective in 1992, and he has a reputation for impeccable and deeply thoughtful scholarship in his chosen area, which is art of the late nineteenth and early to middle twentieth centuries. Elderfield reinstalled the historical collection on the fifth and fourth floors of the new building, in collaboration with three other curators—Ann Temkin, Anne Umland, and Joachim Pissarro. I asked him whether Lowry was involved in the rehanging. "Very little," Elderfield said. "He would wander down from time to time to look at the models, but so would other people. It was clear from the start that he was not making any decisions about what should be or shouldn't be there." Elderfield defends the decision not to give Cézanne's "Bather" and Picasso's "Demoiselles" walls of their own—isolated works "can tend to have a posterish quality, as though they're representing themselves, rather than being themselves," as he explained it—but he is not dogmatic about his choices. "I know that eventually the Cézanne will go back on that wall—but not necessarily permanently," he said. "There will be periodic rotations in some galleries. We've made many changes already, in the Rauschenberg-Johns gallery and the Pollock gallery and elsewhere."

Elderfield's temperate response to the recent criticism, with its underlying note of "give us time," was echoed in one form or another by most of the curators I talked with. "Even though we've been here for nearly two years, I feel we're just getting started," Anne Umland told me. "In five years, if we're still getting lots of criticism, then I'll worry." Ann Temkin, who joined the staff in 2003, after fourteen years at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, agrees with critics who say that in recent years the Modern's contemporary shows have anointed mainly artists who are already in the canon. The museum is now trying to change this, she says, by reactivating the Projects Series—mini-exhibitions of artists who are unknown or little known in New York—and by scheduling a number of one-person and thematic shows by mid-career artists ("something that has happened very rarely over the past thirty years here"). The mid-career shows were inaugurated this summer, with Douglas Gordon's large-scale video works. "I think morale is good," Temkin says. "Curators have a sense that we're building something really strong right now, but it's not the kind of thing that will show up instantly." As for the complaint that there is no single, authoritative aesthetic voice at the museum today, as there was when Rubin or Varnedoe ran the painting-and-sculpture department, several curators see this as a positive change; many voices are better than one in the current aesthetic climate, they say, and no one wants to go back to the bad old days of male hegemony. "I watched Bill Rubin, John Szarkowski, and Arthur Drexler in action," Deborah Wye, the print department's chief curator, who has been at the museum since 1979, says. "And they were such dominant figures that pretty much no one else could say anything. It's not like that now. I think that's healthy for the museum." Whether many voices can ever speak with the curatorial depth and panache of the feudal barons remains to be seen, but virtually everyone on the staff seems to agree that MOMA is still a curator-driven institution. "The museum revolves around the curators," Jennifer Russell assured me. "Anybody who thinks the administrators run MOMA is crazy."

The painting and sculpture curators tend to talk mainly about contemporary art, and you can see why. As Elderfield and others confirm, the historical part of the collection has about the same amount of space that it had in the old building; the big increase—about fifteen thousand square feet—is in the contemporary-art galleries. In addition, there is the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, a vast exhibition space in a former public school in Queens, whose merger with MOMA, in 2000, was conceived and carried out by Lowry and the center's innovative founder-director, Alanna Heiss. Although the merger was predicated on P.S. 1's retaining its own program and its separate identity, the two institutions have drawn closer in recent years. They co-produced the two large "Greater New York" group shows of young talent, and MOMA helped the center raise nine million dollars to renovate and upgrade its facilities. Klaus Biesenbach, P.S. 1's chief curator, is also on the curatorial staff of MOMA's film-and-media department, and Alanna Heiss attends meetings of the MOMA board of trustees, many of whose members are active collectors of contemporary art. "I look at contemporary as the leading



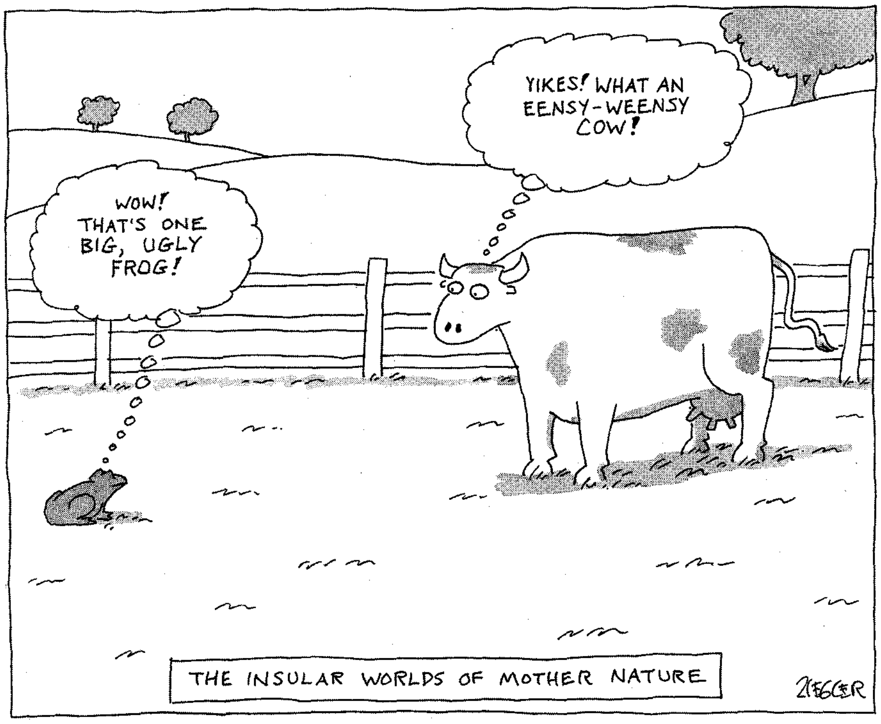
"You can collect for disability. I don't know about inability."

edge of modern art, not as some sort of different category," Lowry told me. "What we recognize is that thinking about, looking at, displaying, and ultimately acquiring contemporary art forces us constantly to look at the way we understand the whole of our collection."

Since 2004, the Modern has had a special Fund for the Twenty-first Century, initiated by Lowry, whose contributors buy works in all media made during the previous five years. The works must then be approved by the acquisition committee of the relevant department, which can accept or reject them; so far, ninety-nine works have been bought through the fund, and almost none have been rejected. Lowry's background in Islamic studies has not prevented him from taking a lively personal interest in contemporary art. Whenever he can, he sets aside Friday afternoons to visit galleries and artists' studios; if he sees something he really likes, he has the dealer put it on hold, and asks the appropriate curator to take a look. The curators all tell me that they have turned down many of his picks, and that's the end of it—no argument from Lowry. But I wonder how comfortable they are with the process.

I also wonder about the museum's accelerated focus on art of the past five years. The astronomical prices being paid by private collectors for work by leading contemporary artists, either at auction or through dealers, have put most museums out of contention. The obvious alternative is to move before the artist gets hot, but should the Modern be doing that? Alfred Barr often spoke of his museum as a laboratory, and said that if one out of eight or ten acquisitions stood the test of time the Modern would be doing well. But he also felt that the museum should stay a certain distance behind the art market; rather than trying to discover the new, it should put developments together as their contours clarified. The museum's real job, in Barr's great phrase, is "the conscientious, continuous, resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity." By plunging into the contemporary quagmire, Lowry and his curators are taking more risks than Barr did. "To do contemporary art, you have to be able to be wrong," Alanna Heiss says. "If you're not wrong, you can never be right. It's more about how wrong MOMA is willing to be, rather than with how right they are or are not."

Questions of right and wrong clouded the museum's recent acquisition of a collection of contemporary drawings assembled by Harvey Shipley Miller. A collector with long service on the board of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Miller is the sole trustee of the Judith Rothschild Foundation, a charitable trust whose assets must be dispersed by 2018. Working closely with Margit Rowell, who was the Modern's chief curator of drawings at the time, he had used the fund to put together an extraordinary collection of Russian illustrated books, which the foundation donated to MOMA in 2001. (He was invited to join the MOMA board soon afterward.) His next passion was for contemporary drawings, and, in a little less than two years, he acquired twenty-six hundred works by more than six hundred and forty artists, from Joseph Beuys and Jasper Johns to new-fledged talents just out of art school. Word began to seep out that he and a private curator were telling dealers that the collection was going to the Museum of Modern Art, and that they were asking for, and getting, museum discounts and special treatment. "I never said that," Miller told me. "That's bull. There is so much misinformation! I said the Judith Rothschild Foundation was buying these, with the intention of giving them to a public institution, and the first place we would offer them is to the Modern—and if they declined it we would go elsewhere." A 2004 interview with Miller in the magazine *New York* indicated that this was to be an all-or-nothing offer to MOMA ("If there is one artist the institution doesn't want, they have to decline the whole collection"), but Miller says that he quickly changed his mind about that. "They could take what they wanted," he told me. "There were no restrictions. And, remember, if Glenn Lowry hadn't supported this from Day One, it would never have happened." Miller, whose natural ebullience sometimes gets in his way ("Concision is not my forte"), also says that he consulted on every drawing with Gary Garrels, who succeeded Rowell as the MOMA drawings curator, but he concedes that many of the consultations were by telephone. "I talked to Harvey every day," Garrels, who left MOMA in 2005 and is now a senior curator at the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, says. "Harvey is like an Energizer Bunny who won't shut down. He got access to incredible material, and there was a lot of resentment." Around the art world, at any rate, the perception that someone who was not a MOMA curator was buying a major collection for the Modern became a fairly titillating scandal. The acquisitions committee for the drawings


YIKES! WHAT AN EENSY-WEENSY COW!
WOW! THAT'S ONE BIG, UGLY FROG!
THE INSULAR WORLDS OF MOTHER NATURE
ZIEGLER

department ended up accepting the collection in toto, and Lowry and others say that when it goes on view its quality will remove all doubts, but several trustees were, and remain, extremely displeased. "I don't think any of us is at all interested in doing anything remotely like this again," Werner H. Kramarsky, a well-known drawings collector and a board member, says. Harvey Miller feels the same way. "There was such jealousy," he told me. "I would never do this again in a billion years."

The Miller episode was fodder for those who say that there is no longer any clear aesthetic authority at the Modern. Few people feel more strongly about this than Robert Storr, who resigned from the painting-and-sculpture staff in 2002. A gifted curator, writer, and teacher, Storr is also a painter, whose work has appeared in several New York galleries. Kirk Varnedoe brought him to the Modern in 1990, in part because Storr was close to the contemporary art scene, knew a lot of artists, and could bring an insider's perspective to the museum. Storr's exhibitions of Gerhard Richter, Max Beckmann, Robert Ryman, and other artists were provocative and revealing; he also engineered a number of important acquisitions, including Richter's "October 18, 1977" series of paintings, and made many close friends at the museum. When Lowry arrived, though, bad feeling between the two men quickly became evident. Lowry, faced with a six-million-dollar deficit in his first year, cut the budget in half for a big survey show of postwar European art that Storr and other curators had spent three years planning—just the kind of show that the critics said MOMA used to do and should be doing. Storr said that they couldn't do the show for a lesser amount, and Lowry cancelled it. Storr, confrontational by nature, spoke out against deaccessions, and questioned Lowry's managerial style. Varnedoe protected him as much as he could, but, when Varnedoe left, Storr decided that his days at MOMA were numbered. He quit to become a professor at the New York University Institute of Fine Arts, and his multiple talents have kept him very busy in several other areas as well; he is a consulting curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, he has agreed to serve as director of next year's Venice Biennale (the first American ever chosen for this premier assignment), and he was recently named dean of the Yale School of Art.

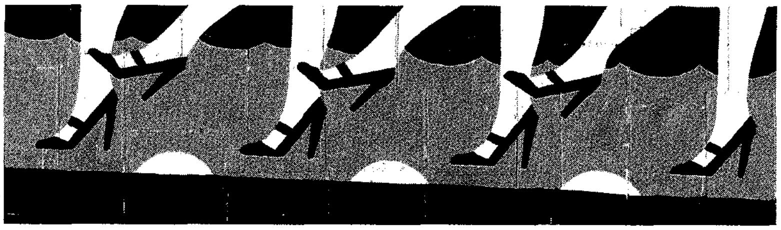
Storr blames Lowry for the "corporate" transformation of MOMA's culture. "There is no question that Glenn is a shrewd, hard-driving manager," he said recently. "Without him the new building would never have been built. But these are not the same skills that make a curator or a program director of a great museum, nor is Glenn's genuine expertise in Islamic art readily transferrable to modern and contemporary art. If Glenn wants to be remembered as a great director at MOMA, he will give his most imaginative and thoughtful curators uncompromised leadership in collecting, in exhibitions, and in the over-all planning of the program—as his predecessors Oldenburg and d'Harnoncourt did. Men who can do it all, like Alfred Barr, do not come twice in an institution's history."

Under Barr, of course, the Modern was a relatively small museum. It is now a much larger one, with more than five times the exhibition space and more than twice as many employees as it had in Barr's last years, and, judged by the standards that apply to most large institutions, it is being run extremely well. Lowry and his staff have more than doubled the endowment, to six hundred and fifty million dollars. Attendance was not affected by the new, twenty-dollar admission fee, and membership has soared to a hundred thousand, just under the Metropolitan Museum's current figure. MOMA's operating budget for this year is a hundred and forty million dollars, and there hasn't been a deficit in the ten years that Lowry has been director. With its new physical plant and its priceless collections, the place can't afford fiscal insouciance. "It became corporate because it had to," Michael Govan, of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, says. "I could argue that it wasn't corporate enough—it decided to be all these things, and to keep going with contemporary art, and honestly, to do that, I think it should be a lot bigger. People miss some of the spirit the museum began with, but is that possible, with more than two million visitors a year and eight hundred employees? MOMA's critics don't have a clue as to what it takes to run something like this."

The internal struggle for the soul of the Modern seems to be over, in any case. Those who hoped that Lowry might move on, now that the building is done—there was a persistent rumor last spring that he might skip to the Getty foundation, whose president resigned in February—have mostly stopped hoping. The old Modern is gone, in any event, and we would probably do well to start making our peace with the new one. And what, we might ask, does the new one really stand for? For half of its lifetime, the Modern was the pioneer, the indispensable prophet and carrier of the modern spirit in its proliferating forms and manifestations. Once, there was no real competition, but now there's plenty, and a few places—the Centre Pompidou, in Paris, the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, the Whitney here—are outperforming MOMA in certain areas, such as innovative exhibitions and contemporary art. The New Museum of Contemporary Art reopens here next year, in a new building downtown; its strong curatorial staff is expected to bring a new energy to the local art scene. The Modern, under Lowry, is committed to being the leading museum of twenty-first-century art, as well as the art of the century before, but there is no certainty that this will happen. "MOMA's success has been predicated on the absolute finesse of its collections," Kathy Halbreich, the Walker's director, says. "It's hard for it to play in the dirt, where the artists live. I think there's a fear of failure, which artists can smell."

I went back to the museum the other day, and spent some time in the large fourth-floor gallery devoted to paintings by Jackson Pollock. No other museum could put together, from its own collection, a room like this. You see where Pollock came from, and what he found, and the miracle of what he did with it. The crowd of visitors more or less ceased to exist for me. It may be that part of the problem here does have to do with the audience, after all—not with the big, new audience but with the old one, which includes people like me. In time, with different expectations and a more tolerant mind-set, we might come to realize, once again, what we have. ♦

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

DRESSED FOR EXCESS

Marie Antoinette, out of the closet.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

Marie Antoinette, the ex-Queen of France, was thirty-seven when she was taken from her cell in the Conciergerie, the fourteenth-century fortress on the Île de la Cité, and paraded in an open oxcart to the scaffold in the Place de la Révolution, a mile away. Some of the onlookers in the vast crowd lining the route that morning, on October 16, 1793, may have been among those screaming obscenities at her in 1789, when they marched with pikes on Versailles; or axed their way, in 1792, into her apartment in the Tuileries, where they spent their fury on her mirrors and closets; or waved the severed head of her friend and look-alike, the lovely Princesse de Lamballe, on a halberd outside her window. But now they observed an eerie silence.

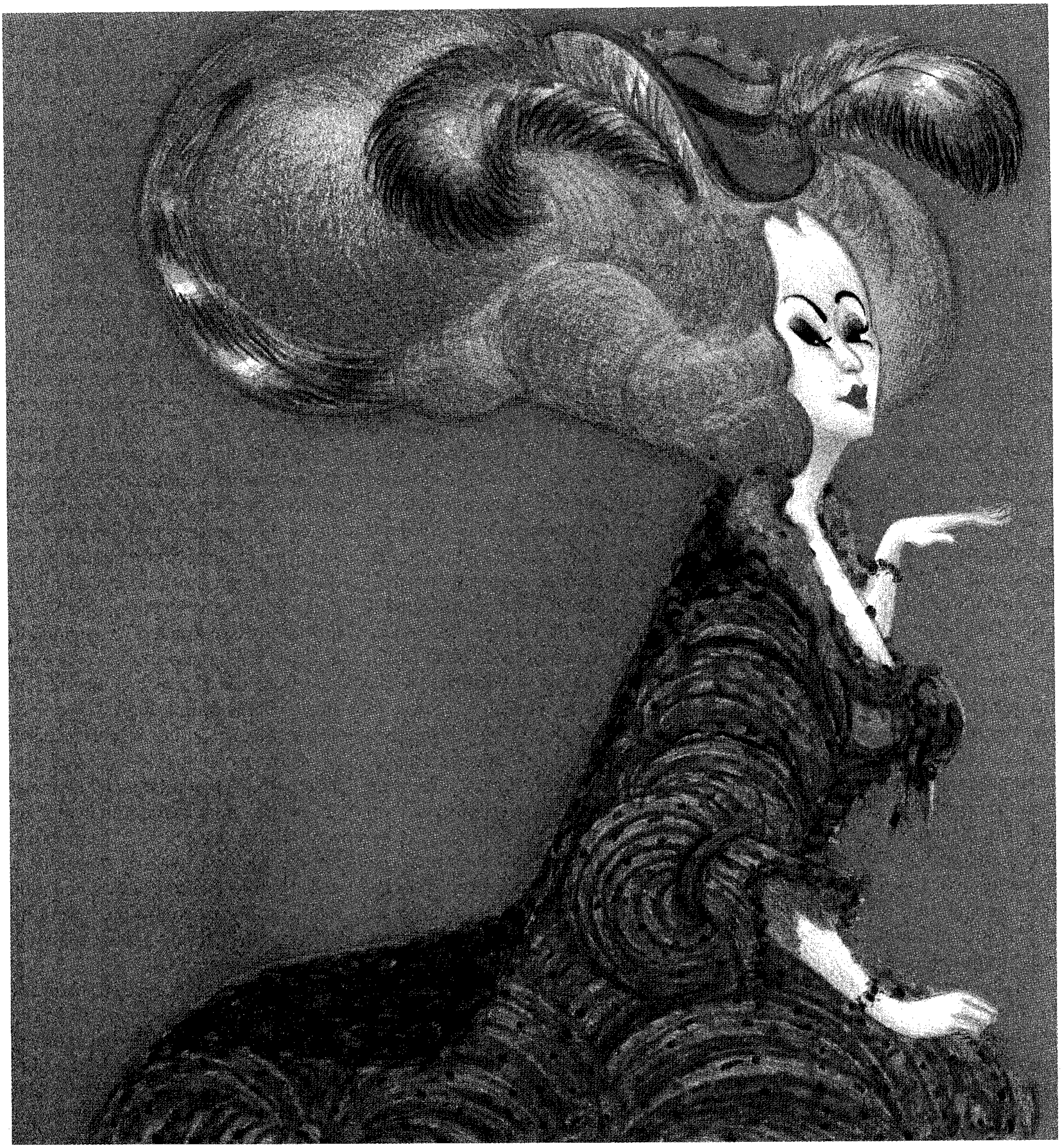
Her husband, Louis XVI, who lost his title when the monarchy was abolished, had been guillotined nine months earlier, though he was spared the indignity of riding in a tumbrel with bound hands. The Jacobin extremists then seized her son. The eight-year-old Louis Charles—Louis XVII to royalists—had clung to her skirts and was pulled off. As part of his reëducation, his captors plied him with alcohol between beatings and taught him the "Marseillaise," which he sang with a heartbreaking swagger, wearing the red bonnet of a sansculotte. He testified that she had molested him, and his evidence was presented at her brief show trial for treason and moral turpitude. He died two years later, alone in a dungeon.

No other queen, except perhaps Cleopatra, was more intent than Marie Antoinette on dressing for history. While her instincts for self-display had worked more toward her undoing than her glory, they served her a last time. The mourning outfit she had worn day and night since her husband's death, in defiance of a Jacobin edict against black (a color symbolic of monarchist sympathies), had grown increasingly shabby. But, knowing that she would need to make a final and unforgettable impression—at her execution—she had managed to acquire a pristine chemise, petticoat, morning dress, and bonnet, all in white.

Early on the day of her death, Marie Antoinette arose from a few sleepless hours on her straw pallet and began her toilette. At dawn, the Jacobins' chief executioner, Citizen Sanson, arrived to cut off her hair. It had turned white in the course of a few days in June of 1791, during the captive royal family's ill-conceived flight to Varennes, which had ended with their recapture. The artist Jacques-Louis David, a radical member of the National Convention, watched the death march from a window, and what he perceived as the "arrogance" of the traitor's mien particularly incensed him. He sketched a hasty portrait of a wasted crone with a scornful grimace and a ramrod spine. Her dress looks like a shroud.

The former Queen had been denied a priest of her choice (one of the dissidents who had refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the Revolution), so she mounted the scaffold alone and apologized to Sanson for stepping on his toe. After he released the blade, he exhibited the head, as was customary, and the crowd, shaken from its trance, roared, "*Vive la République!*" The remains were then taken to a cemetery off the Rue d'Anjou, where the bodies of the King and of his Swiss Guard—who were butchered orgiastically at the Tuileries, with other royal retainers—had been buried, the latter in a trench. The gravediggers, as Antonia Fraser writes in her biography "Marie Antoinette: The Journey" (2001), were taking a lunch break, so they left the Queen's head and body lying on the grass, giving a young sculptor—Marie Grosholtz, who later became Madame Tussaud—an opportunity to take a wax imprint for a death mask. In 1815, a year after the Bourbon monarchy was restored, Louis XVIII, the King's perfidious younger brother (who had married his son to Marie Antoinette's only surviving child, Marie Thérèse), exhumed the relics and had them reburied in state, at the Cathedral of St. Denis. Chateaubriand was present at the ceremony, and he claimed to have recognized the head immediately, Fraser writes, "by the special shape of the Queen's mouth, recalling that dazzling smile she had given him at Versailles." But all that was left, besides a skull, some hair, and the nostalgia of a Romantic, were two garters, in perfect condition.

Marie Antoinette is periodically disinterred in order to be reviled or celebrated or, as in recent years, to help sell clothes, as she did when she was queen. This fall, her latest avatar, Kirsten Dunst, looking dewy and regal, is ubiquitous in magazines promoting a new film biography directed by Sofia Coppola and based on Fraser's life. Coppola herself is a fashion celebrity and muse, who helps to publicize the work of designer friends by wearing it with the teasing glamour of a jaded virgin playing dress-up in her mother's clothes. She has always been drawn to beautiful, trapped girls, who belong to a generation too cynical to unite in rebellion and too cool to unite in conformity. You can see why she thought that the "teen Queen"—a hostage to appearances—would make a good subject. But, rather than play to her forte for impiety, she and an ensemble of virtuoso technicians have produced—despite the odd, postmodern wink—a san-



The right saw her as a foreign agent, "l'Autrichienne," and decried her corrupting influence on the women who aspired to her chic.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

itized, old-fashioned costume picture.

Vogue predicts that the movie "will have a considerable impact on fashion for years to come," though the shape of that impact is a bit hard to imagine, like Chateaubriand's vision of the smile. Every new runway season seems to recapitulate some version of the artificial face-off between decadent royalism and radical chic, and has done so for about twenty years. But perhaps people who live for fashion worship Marie Antoinette precisely because she represents a time when one had to take sides, and dressing not only defined them—it was a matter of survival.

Few tyrants have aroused more visceral hatred than Marie Antoinette, an ordinary woman whose life is infinitely more complex than she was. That hatred, which is usually chalked up to the sentiments expressed in a sentence she never uttered, "Let them eat cake," has become part of her mystique. Her downfall—a cautionary tale for politicians out of touch with their base—began almost the moment she arrived at Versailles, as a fourteen-year-old dauphine who recklessly decided to emancipate herself from the constraints of court protocol and, at the same time, to impress the courtiers she was offending with a display of prestige she didn't possess.

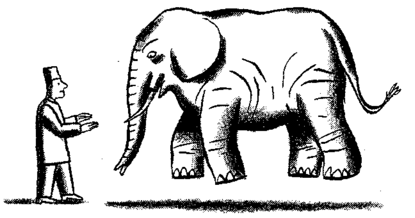
Marie Antoinette's prestige depended principally on one attribute—her fertility—and her shy, obese, fifteen-year-old bridegroom wouldn't deflower her (or at least finish the job) for seven years. Louis XVI is, like his wife, something of a cipher, but prolonged exposure to her hectic glamour begins to make his dreariness appealing. He spent his leisure, which was considerable, turning locks on a private forge (he had a touching faith in the virtue of useful labor), when he wasn't hunting in the forest, and in that respect—his passion for the chase—he couldn't have been a stranger to desire. He was less of a reactionary than many of his courtiers, including the Queen; he was, to certain modern eyes, admirable in his antiheroic distaste for violence and martial preening; he understood that the appalling tax code needed reform; yet he was passive and befuddled.

On numerous occasions, and as tactfully as possible, Marie Antoinette brought up the subject of "living in the intimacy" required of their vows, as did his physicians, and Louis made promises to act that he couldn't keep. In 1777, two and a half years into his kingship, he finally managed the feat. But the bizarre impasse was resolved only when Marie Antoinette's older brother, the brusque and plainspoken Emperor Joseph II of Austria, arrived at Versailles to have a frank talk with his sister about her spendthrift ways, and with the bumbling dynast about his obligations. Joseph was filled with contempt at the discovery, he wrote to his cadet, Archduke Leopold, in Vienna, that the King "has strong, perfectly satisfactory erections; he introduces his member, stays there without moving for about two minutes, withdraws without ejaculating but still erect, and bids goodnight." If he had been there, he swore, he would have had Louis whipped "so that he would have come out of sheer rage like a donkey."

Apart from the humiliation of having her bedsheets checked for blood or "emissions," and her periods reported on by ambassadors to every court in Europe, the ordeal of Marie Antoinette's prolonged virginity trapped her in a perilous limbo. As long as an annulment was possible, she had to cultivate an "appearance of credit" with the King, as she explained to her brother. Cultivating the appearance of virtue might have been a more politic strategy, but she chose, instead, to model her style and behavior on those of a royal paramour. The wives of Louis XIV and Louis XV had both been pious and obscure wallflowers, which is precisely what the French expected from a good queen. Their husbands' chief favorites, however—Mesdames de Montespan, de Pompadour, and du Barry (a ravishing former prostitute with appalling manners who was still plying her trade with the old Louis XV when Antoinette arrived at court)—were glittering cynosures whose power no one dared to ignore. So the scorned virgin began to upgrade her fictitious "credit" by acquiring the flamboyant wardrobe of a kept woman (lest the point be lost, she appeared at one of her masked balls as Gabrielle d'Estrées, the Renaissance mistress of Henri IV, wearing a cloud of silver-spangled white gauze, a diamond stomacher and girdle, and a skirt swagged with gold fringe that was pinned up by more diamonds), as well as a private real-estate portfolio of incalculable worth, including the Petit Trianon, which was built for Pompadour, and Saint-Cloud, an asset of the Crown, which she had transferred to her name.

In 1774, Louis XV, the Dauphin's grandfather, died suddenly of smallpox, at sixty-four. "God help us," nineteen-year-old Louis XVI exclaimed, "for we are too young to reign." Shortly after his coronation, a year later, at which the Queen made herself particularly conspicuous in an embroidered gown encrusted with sapphires and a towering ziggurat of powdered hair, she had her portrait painted for her mother. When the Empress Maria Theresa received it, she was aghast. "No, this is not the portrait of a queen of France," she wrote back. "This is the portrait of an actress!"

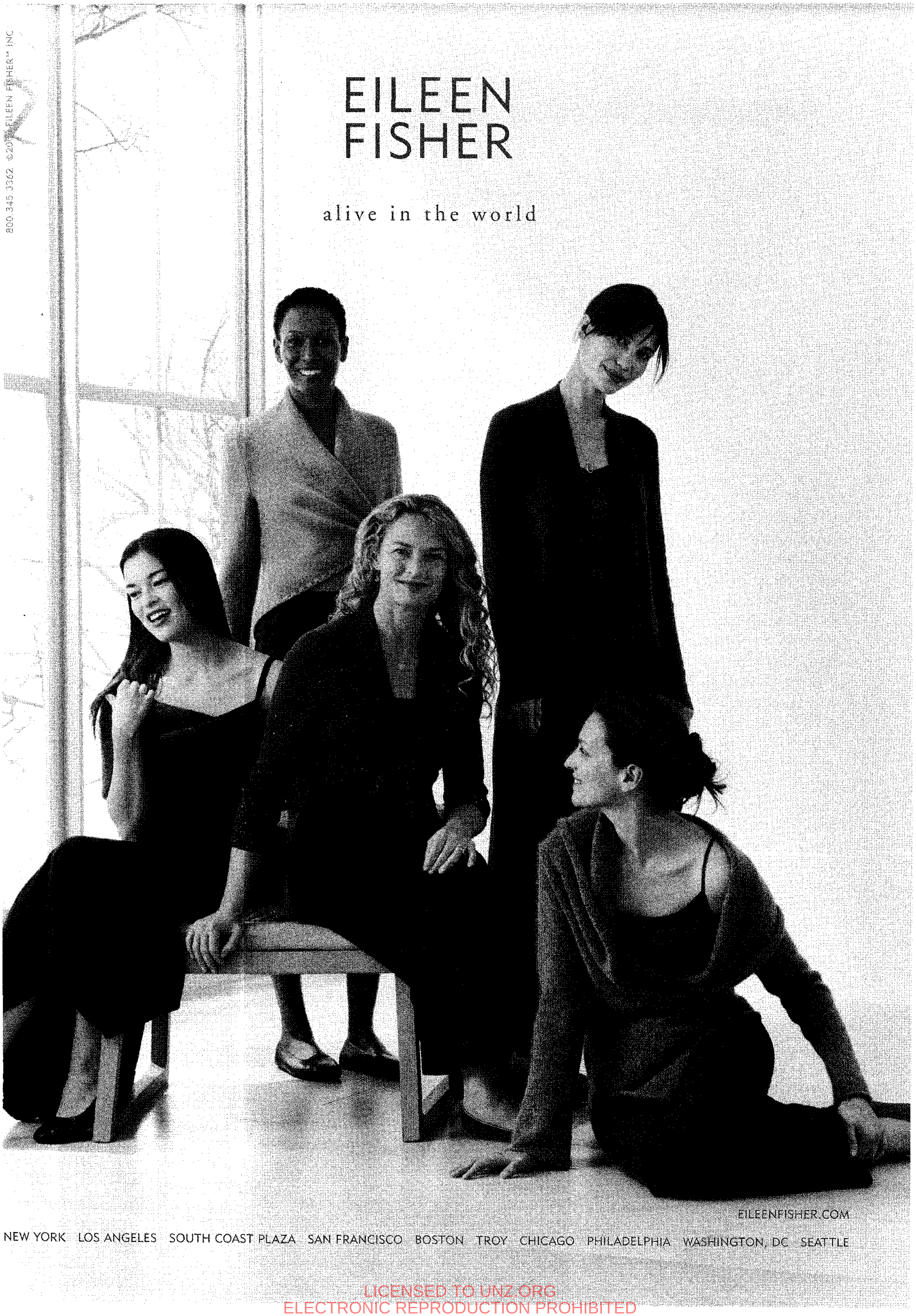
The staggering expenses that Marie Antoinette's quixotic game plan incurred were paid for by levies on the Third Estate. Her budget overruns on an annual clothing allowance of about $3.6 million in current spending power were, in some years, more than double. Sometimes the King made up the difference, and occasionally the Queen made a propitiatory gesture of economy—she once refused a parure on the ground that the Navy could use a new battleship. But her chronic debt was one source of the epithet Madame Déficit, the other being her expedience as a scapegoat for enemies on both the right and the left. The former saw her as an insidious foreign agent—*l'Autrichienne* (the epithet contains a pun on the word for "bitch," *chienne*)—and decried her corrupting influence on the countless Frenchwomen who aspired to her chic.



The republicans saw Marie Antoinette as the insatiable parasite who embodied all the evils of her regime, but one should note that the millions she funnelled to her architects, gardeners, entertainers, caterers, cobblers, perfumers, decorators, coiffeurs, and—most egregiously—dressmakers wouldn't have been sufficient to compensate for the disastrous wars and centuries of corruption and inequity that were responsible for the country's bankruptcy. As a symptom, however, the inventory of her follies was hard to ignore. (Fraser asks one to forgive, if not thank, the prodigal Queen for helping to create "things of great delight," and she cites the boudoir at Fontainebleau as the "supreme example.") A gown or headdress from Marie Antoinette's favorite *marchande de mode,* Rose Bertin, could easily cost twenty times what a skilled worker earned in a year, and if he wanted to see where his taxes went he could visit the Queen's wardrobe—it was open to the public.

Until the end, the ferocious hatred of the people didn't much perturb Marie Antoinette. She had told her mother, years before, that the French were "thoughtless in character but not bad; pens and tongues say many things that do not come from the heart." She seems to have thought of her own heart as pure: that of an enlightened queen who provided dowries for indigent maidens; imported peasant playmates for her children to teach them humility; adopted the orphan of a chambermaid; supported artists, like her music teacher Gluck and his protégé Salieri; and paid homage to the ideals of Rousseau by building an enchanting, faux-rustic village—the Hameau—where she and her ladies liked to dress in exorbitantly simple lawn frocks known as *gaulles,* set off by a ribbon sash and a straw hat.

A pure heart, however, does not en-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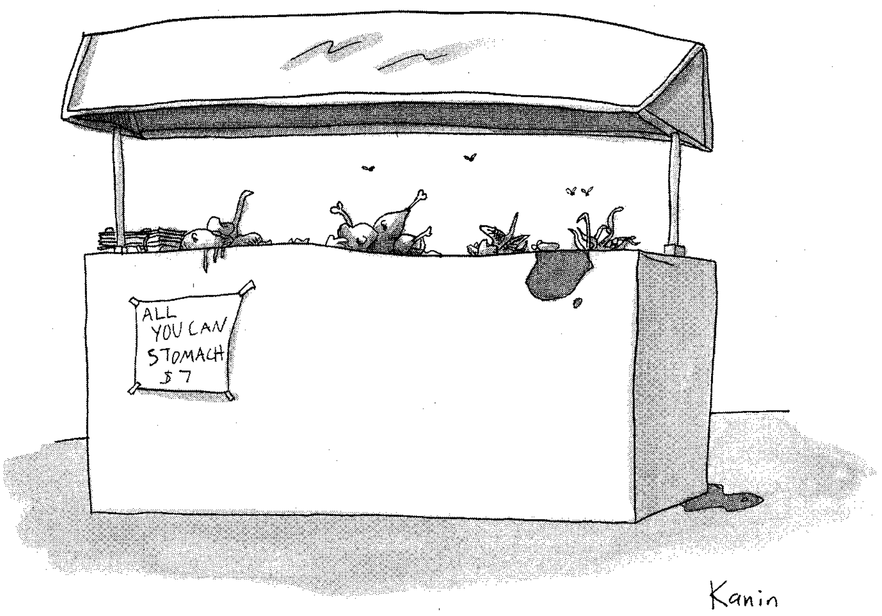

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tirely rule out an adulterous love affair. It isn't certain (though it seems likely, Fraser thinks) that the Queen consummated her lifelong romance with Count Axel Fersen, a Swedish officer of immense charm and wealth who fought with the French forces in America, and who, in the royal triangle (if that's what it was), played Mars to Louis's Vulcan. He had met the Dauphine one night by chance in the days when she and her ladies (noble age-mates who, a contemporary wrote, "loved pleasure and hated restraint; laughed at everything, even the tattle about their own reputations; and recognized no law save the necessity of spending their lives in gaiety") would throw a hooded cloak over their panniers, escape to Paris, and mingle with masked strangers of mixed estate at the opera balls. The affair probably began only once the King had managed to make Antoinette "a real wife," but it continued sporadically whenever Fersen's military and diplomatic missions brought him to Versailles. The King was fond of his gallant company, and Fersen proved his devotion, if not his competence, by helping to orchestrate the flight to Varennes.

But, apart from her profligate and imprudent greed, there was nothing vicious about Marie Antoinette. She never so much as dreamed of the atrocities, including incest and pedophilia, attributed to her as the "French Messalina" and the "Austrian whore." By the standards of Versailles (which were admittedly deplorable), she was a loyal consort, a besotted mother, and a virtuous enough wife. Nor did the French people entirely begrudge the Queen her lavish toilettes. She was expected, indeed required, to make a patriotic public display of support for the luxury trades, particularly silk weaving, an important sector of the economy. But Marie Antoinette never understood that her splendor was a form of livery, and that with it came hieratic duties and sacrifices. She could not have been killed had she not first been deconsecrated, and she had unwittingly colluded in her own deconsecration by asserting her divine right to the one privilege no deified being can exercise with impunity. That, as she put it to her mother, was "to be myself."

Maria Theresa would have preferred to trade one of her older girls to France, an untested ally, but one was pockmarked and the others were married or dead. Though Antoinette, like her fiancé, was a dynastic spare (until his father and two brothers died prematurely, Louis had been fourth in line), beauty strengthened her hand. She was, according to her lady of the bedchamber and biographer, Madame Campan, a lithe and blue-eyed ash blonde "bursting with freshness," who gave the picky French little to complain of. Even her detractors admired her majestic carriage and peerless complexion. Her flat chest initially caused a disgruntled murmur, but two months before the marriage the Empress was pleased to inform the King's envoy that her daughter had "become a woman." They were both confident that once she was a wife with a busy womb the bosom would fill out.

The "handover" (*remise*) of a dauphine was a ritual not unlike a real-estate closing, with a final inspection attended by representatives for each party to the sale. The initial report, however, had flagged some minor flaws that needed correction. So the Parisian dentist who invented braces was imported to straighten the archducal teeth; a dancing master taught Antoinette the distinctive, gliding shuffle of court ladies; and a French coiffeur, M. Larsenneur, artfully dissembled her unfashionably high forehead and the bald spots at her hairline. The rather more glaring bald spots in her culture and education were confided for repair to the worldly Abbé de Vermond, who did what he could with a lazy pupil who had been both spoiled and neglected.

Once the makeover was complete, and the frugal Empress had stoically ponied up four hundred thousand livres (the yearly income of a great nobleman) for a trousseau worthy of her new in-laws, the Dauphine and her entourage set off for France. Envoys of Louis XV greeted her at the border, where she entered a pavilion built for the *remise* on a riverine island that straddled the frontier of the two kingdoms. As a driving rainstorm rattled the flimsy roof, and the future Queen digested the import of a tapestry that depicted Medea slaughtering her children, her Austrian retinue solemnly stripped her before all assembled and bundled up the clothes and possessions, including her pug, named Mops, that were tainted with her foreignness. Weeping and shivering, she became Crown property at the moment that her new ladies redressed her.

Marie Antoinette was twice handed over: first to produce the legitimate heir to an ossified monarchy, then to help legitimatize the fanatics who abolished it. A scholar of the eighteenth century, Pierre Saint-Amand, sums up her life between those brackets as "a series of costumed events." That is a fair description

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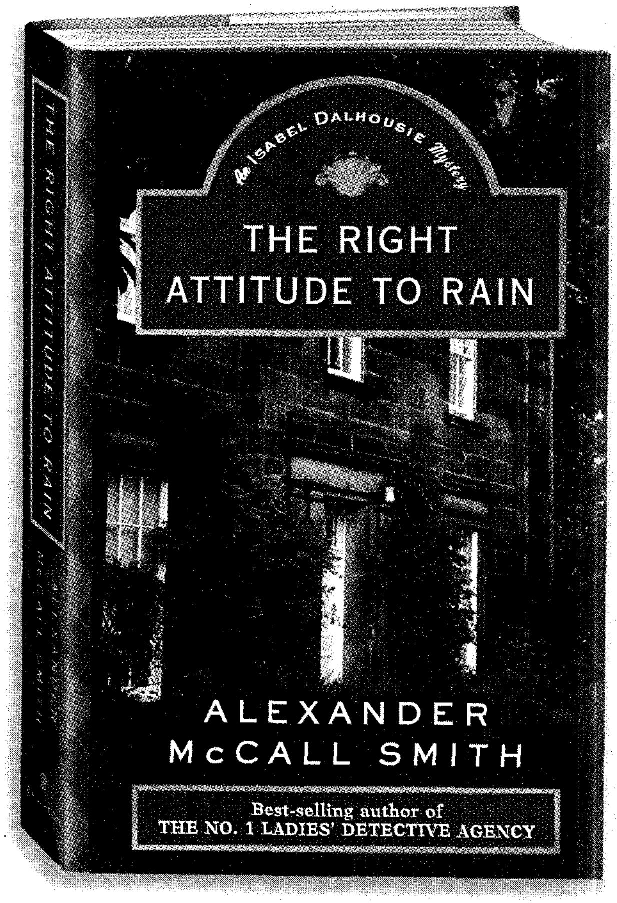
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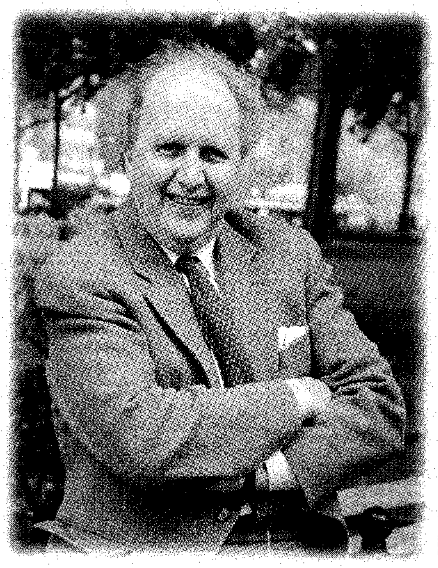

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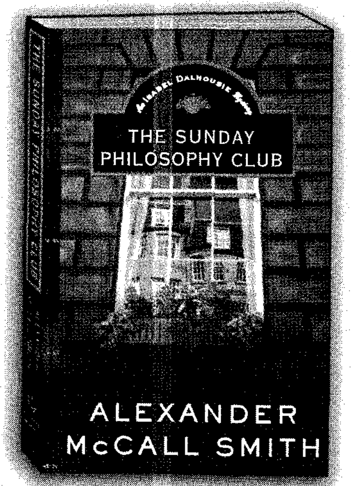
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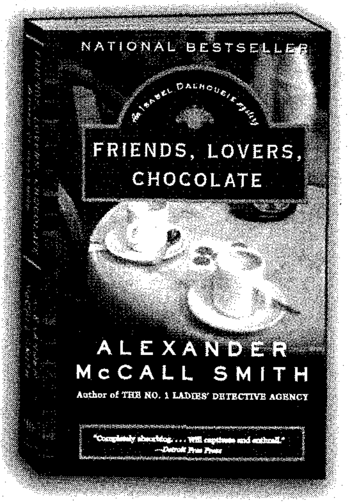
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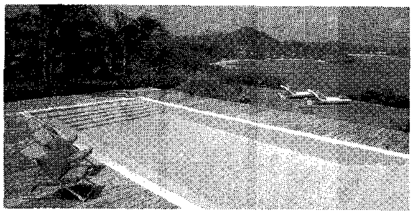

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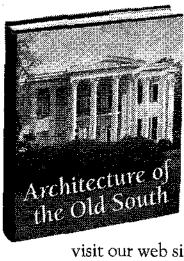

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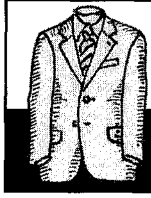

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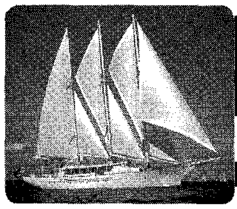

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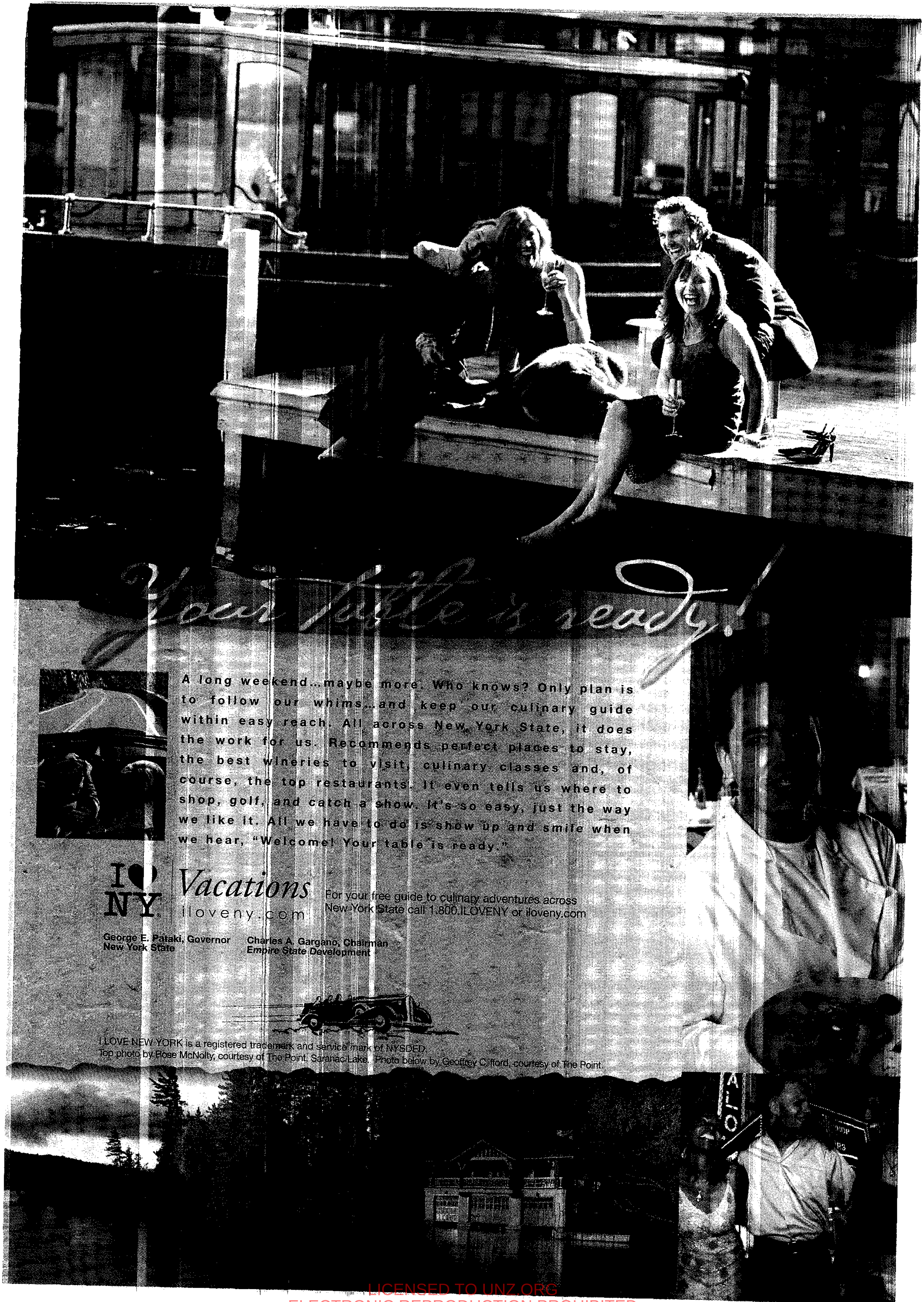
of Coppola's film, and also of the premise of a new biography, "Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution" (Holt; $27.50), by Caroline Weber, a professor at Barnard. Her subtitle suggests how tempting it is even for a serious historian to lark on her subject's principal obsession. In the gloriously witty age of *esprit*, the Queen chose to—or perhaps could only—express herself in the hyper-exclamatory prose of (as Weber puts it) her "fashion statements." It is always gratifying to discover how much a fashion statement can mean, and Weber's account of the transition from the ancien régime to the Republic from a sartorial point of view is a perceptive work of scholarship that helps, in a way, to explain the transcendent importance of fashion to French culture.

But was Marie Antoinette really a spirited rebel challenging "the oppressive cultural strictures and harsh political animosities that beset her . . . by turning her clothes and other accoutrements into defiant expressions of autonomy and prestige"? Many of her contemporaries—and not only the libellous pamphleteers and pornographers—wouldn't have agreed. "To be the most *à la mode* woman alive," the Comtesse de Boigne wrote, "seemed to [the Queen] to be the most desirable thing imaginable." One might also argue that what strikes a modern academic as proto-feminist self-"empowerment" also bears a suspicious resemblance to the posturing of a willful teen-ager who breaks the rules, ignores her mother's nagging, and does as she pleases to be thought cool.

Sometime in the mid-seventeen-seventies, a young perfumer named Jean-Louis Fargeon, who had recently immigrated to Paris from his native Montpellier and taken over a well-established shop on the Rue du Roule, was invited to present samples of his work to Madame du Barry. Fargeon came from a family of artisans, and had recently graduated from journeyman to master. But he was also a student of the Enlightenment who had been deeply moved by Rousseau's assertion that the nose is the door to the soul. The fame of his products—not only scents and oils but cosmetics, powders, pomades, hair dyes, and such dainty novelties as a tongue-scraper—attracted the Queen's attention. Elisabeth de Feydeau, a French professor (with a doctorate in "the history of perfume" from the Sorbonne—*Vive la France!*), tells the story of their relations in "A Scented Palace: The Secret History of Marie Antoinette's Perfumer" (Tauris; $26.95), a sparely written and subtly distilled life. Fargeon's impressions of Marie Antoinette are particularly compelling, in part because of their intimacy and his keen senses, but in part because he is a witness who, despite a vocation that depended almost entirely on an aristocratic clientele, believed ardently in the ideals of the Revolution.

The perfumer was shocked by his first visit to the palace for some of the reasons it must also have shocked Marie Antoinette, who had grown up in a court and a family where impeccable hygiene was an article of faith. Not only did courtiers at Versailles look embalmed behind their masks of white powder and rouge but the many who bathed only once a year smelled like corpses. The filthy halls and courtyards stank of the excrement from humans and pets; dead cats floated in stagnant water; and a butcher plied his trade—gutting and roasting pigs—at the entrance to the ministers' wing. But Fargeon was equally struck by the arcane ritual of the Queen's *lever*, when, having proved himself, he was given the privilege of attending it. Madame Campan, in her memoirs, describes the bathing-and-dressing ceremony as "a masterpiece of etiquette," though the young Dauphine quickly got bored and exasperated at being fetishized by a tribal cult that required her to stand naked and impassive while waiting for an exalted pit crew to coördinate the task of passing a shift. "It's odious! What a bother!" she had exclaimed in an outburst so sacrilegious that it became immortal. She eventually found a way around the bother: she invited Bertin to dress her, and, since her ladies-in-waiting—daughters of the Crusades—refused to share the honor with a former shop clerk, they withdrew.

Fargeon often collaborated on scented accessories with the earthy Bertin—a genius who not only earned but invented her place in history as a political eminence whom her detractors called the Minister of Fashion. She was the architect of the famous *pouf*, and Léonard—the royal hairdresser ("the personification," de Feydeau writes, "of one of the little, beribboned marquises Molière used to make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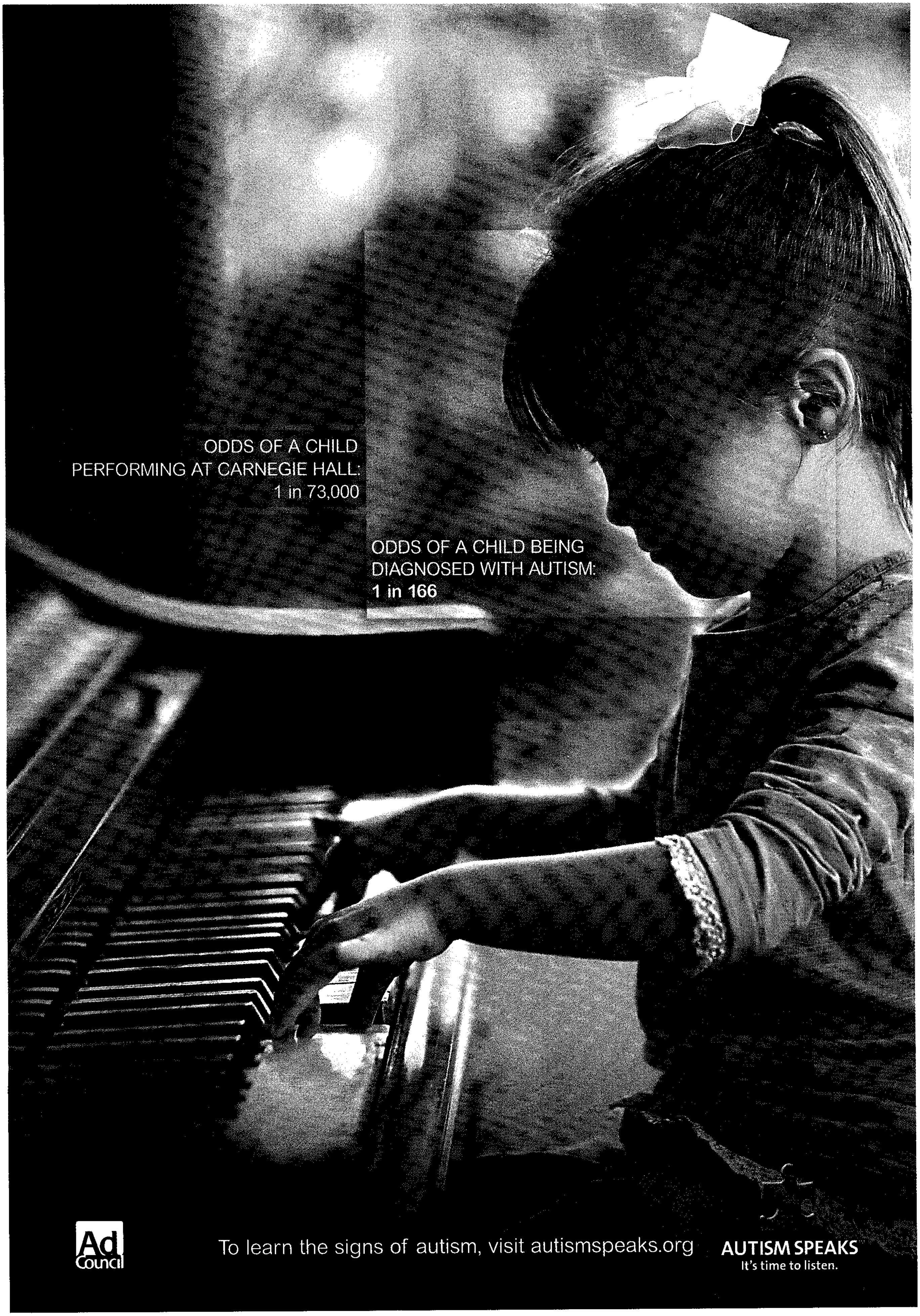

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fun of")—was its engineer. This amusingly freakish coiffure became the rage all over Europe, and, like most of the Queen's fashion fantasias, it proved particularly ruinous to her plebeian imitators, who, it was said, sacrificed their dowries on the altar of the Austrian's frivolity, and thus their chances of marriage, then turned to rich protectors to take up the slack, so in the end—the omega of such arguments—the French birth rate suffered.

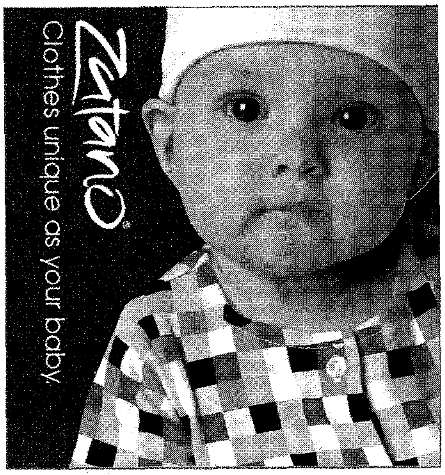
The *pouf* was a cross between a topiary and a Christmas tree, and each creation, about a yard high, had a sentimental or political theme, depending on the wearer and the occasion. It started with a wire form that Léonard padded with wool, cloth, horsehair, and gauze, interweaving the client's tresses with fake hair. When the edifice had been well stiffened with pomade and dusted with powder (vermin were fond of both, so fashionable ladies carried long-handled head-scratchers), it was ready to be trimmed with its defining scene. Ships, barnyards, vegetables, battles, nativities, and even a husband's infidelities were some of the themes. Weber calls the *poufs* "personalized mobile billboards," and the Queen wore a *pouf à l'inoculation* to publicize her triumph in persuading the King to be vaccinated against smallpox. Perched in the hairdo was a serpent in an olive tree (symbols of wisdom and Aesculapius), behind which rose the golden sun of enlightenment.

One of Fargeon's last interviews with the Queen took place in the Tuileries, in 1791. She had summoned him for an urgent matter, "greeted him kindly," de Feydeau writes, "and asked him what he, as a bourgeois of Paris, thought of the events." He had the tact to parry the question, but the first thing he noticed was the scent of a perfume he had created for her in happier days. They had walked along a path outside the Trianon, and she had asked him for two essences: one for "an elegant and virile man," and the other, an elixir of the Trianon itself, "so that she could carry it wherever she went." But now he realized with dismay that the scent of the Trianon had gone off.

Marie Antoinette was, in fact, planning her flight to Varennes, and she wanted Fargeon to restock her enormous toilet case for the journey. She had already seen to the fitting out of an impractically huge plush-lined carriage, loaded with as many amenities—a dining table, commodes, cooking equipment—as a Winnebago; and she had let herself be distracted from more salient preoccupations by fussing with Bertin over a luxurious new wardrobe, which distressed Madame Campan, because "that seemed useless and even dangerous to me, and I pointed out that the Queen of France will find chemises and dresses everywhere." But, de Feydeau continues, Marie Antoinette "could not conceive of going without her coiffeur, so Léonard was informed. He was to bring the coffer carrying the Queen's diamonds and to alert the horse relays of the approach of the fugitives." His grandiose bungling helped to betray the plot.

Fargeon had been stirred, in 1789, by the Tennis Court Oath, and its promise of a new order. Though the vitriol aimed at the Queen distressed him, he was more of a republican than his wife, who fainted when she heard drunks in the Rue de Roule singing one of the more vile revolutionary songs. Fargeon explained the paradox of his feelings. Marie Antoinette, he said, was kind and bountiful to individuals, and nothing like her caricatures. Yet, as de Feydeau puts it, "her subjects were creatures of fiction to her." One had to distinguish between the woman and the Queen, he concluded, as "every monarchy was, by nature, tyrannical." This was his paraphrase of Saint-Just's famous dictum: "No one reigns innocently." But what was true of the Queen was also true of her alchemist. He recognized the humanity of Marie Antoinette but categorically despised a whole class.

I can't help thinking of Marie Antoinette as a prototype for Emma Bovary, another naïve young beauty who marries a boorish glutton, equally naïve, and lets herself be seduced by a *marchand de mode*. The Bovarys, too, were a couple with no qualities beyond the ordinary, who were doomed to an extraordinary disgrace, and both stories have a brutal ending in which no justice is served. That absence of catharsis marks the point at which tragedy loses its exaltation and becomes modern—not a tale foretold about the death of kings but the story of a futile downfall that might have been averted. And it was left to Flaubert to democratize the wisdom of Saint-Just. His works insist that no one is human innocently. ♦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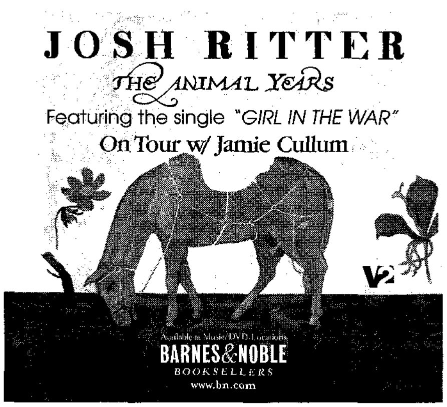
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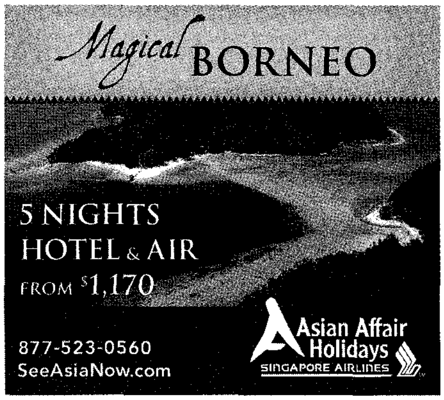
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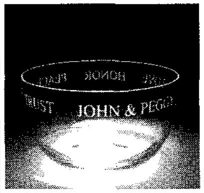
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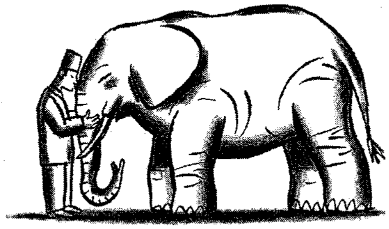
BRIEFLY NOTED

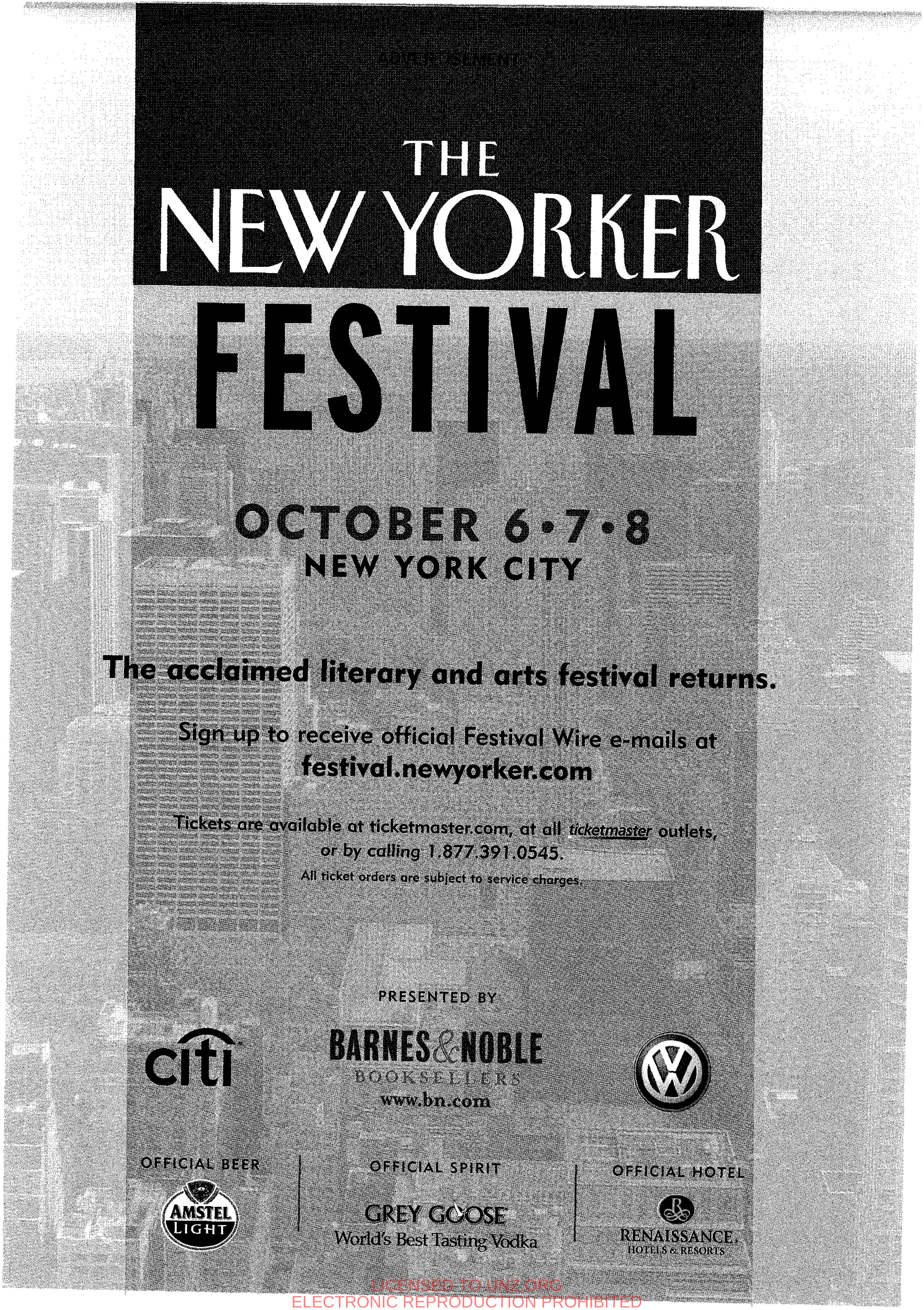
Only Revolutions, *by Mark Z. Danielewski (Pantheon; $26).* In his new novel, the author of "House of Leaves" is up to his old tricks—multicolored and upside-down text—and some flabbergasting new ones, including a double-ended structure that obliges the reader to flip the book every eight pages. (Two place-holding ribbons are provided.) The plot involves a pair of teen-agers, Sam and Hailey, who narrate alternating accounts of a freewheeling adventure through America. Their main activity seems to be having sex in a car, though the language leaves room for doubt: "I pop lobgobs of orifice missing / globblobs, swiggling thrushrushed," says Sam. Some of the calmer passages show real talent, but there is little payoff. After all the wishfully Joycean compounds, Whitman-derived versifying, and opportunities for losing one's place (the ribbons slip off the page as easily as the gobbledygook slips from the mind), one ends up asking, with Sam, "*Why for?*"

Giraffe, *by J. M. Ledgard (Penguin Press; $24.95).* Based on the true story of the slaughter, in Czechoslovakia, in 1975, of the largest captive herd of giraffes, Ledgard's meditative novel creates a textured allegory for the country's oppression by its Communist regime. The story follows a hemodynamicist who has studied the giraffes, and a factory worker whose somnambulism is alleviated in their presence. Both are entranced by the creatures' stately aloofness, and when the order comes to kill the giraffes, which are infected with a contagious disease, they attempt to bring a measure of humanity to the workings of the state. Ledgard combines fine research with lyrical style; his description of a giraffe's astonishingly complex circulatory system is particularly memorable. The use of recurring images—mermaids, a rusalka (a Slavic water nymph)—conjures a world of fantasy and menace, balanced between dream and nightmare.



The Tyrannicide Brief, *by Geoffrey Robertson (Pantheon; $30).* In 1649, after Oliver Cromwell and his army had taken King Charles I prisoner, they had to decide what to do with him. The easiest option, according to a contemporary, was assassination, "for which there were hands ready enough to be employed." Instead, a lawyer named John Cooke was given the brief to prosecute him. (Other lawyers left town to dodge the job.) At the time, there was no language for what Charles was charged with: as king, he was the law, so prosecuting him seemed a logical absurdity. Robertson, a lawyer involved in the prosecutions of Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein, credits Cooke with helping to make those proceedings possible; he "made tyranny a crime." But Cooke himself was executed after the monarchy was restored. His heart and genitals were fed to stray dogs, and his head, at King Charles II's direction, was displayed at the entrance to Westminster Hall.

The Family That Couldn't Sleep, *by D. T. Max (Random House; $25.95).* Beginning with the story of an Italian clan whose members die of a mysterious inability to sleep, Max traces science's tortuous path toward understanding prion diseases—a category that includes scrapie in sheep, B.S.E. in cows, and kuru, a disease spread by cannibalism which decimated one New Guinean tribe. Victims of fatal familial insomnia lose control of neuromuscular function, existing in a merciless limbo between sleep and wakefulness until they die of exhaustion. For a half century, prion diseases have baffled scientists, because the transmission of illness by proteins, which are non-living, was considered impossible. Max, who suffers from a distantly related neuromuscular disease, narrates recent advances in prion science with engaging clarity. But, as he reflects ruefully, "the neurologist can diagnose you but he can't cure you."



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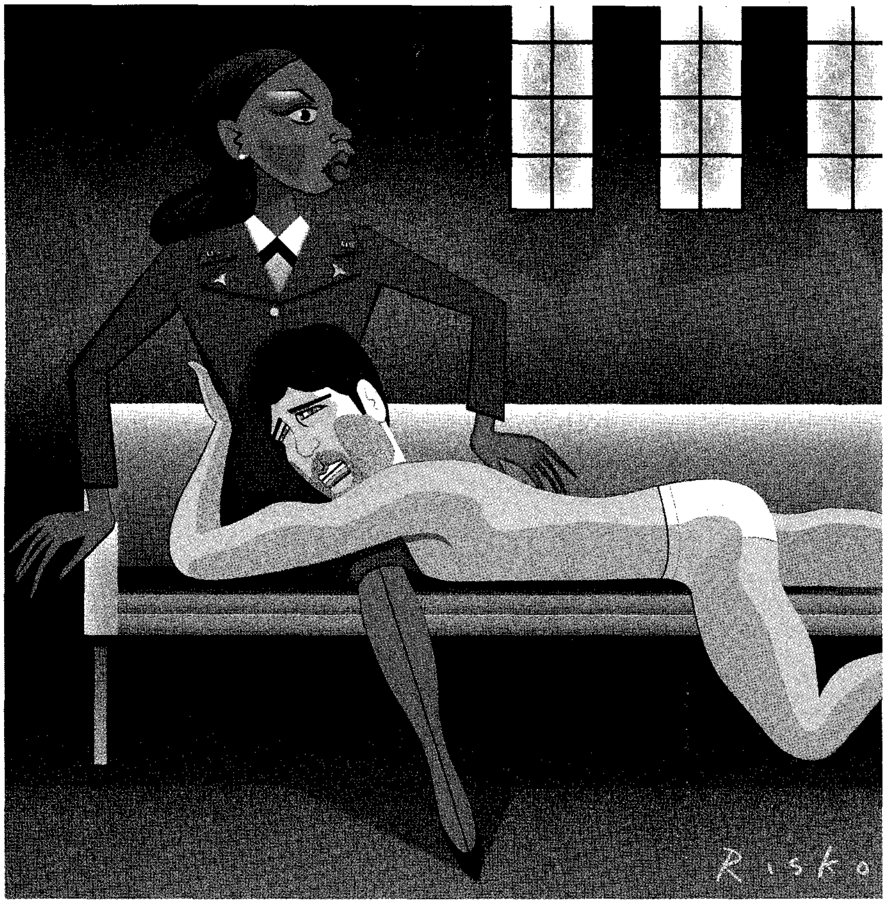
Eve Ensler takes on post-traumatic stress disorder.

BY HILTON ALS

Just as Hollywood has its star paradigms—Scarlett Johansson, for instance, is a direct descendant of Veronica Lake—the contemporary American theatre offers audiences a comfortable degree of familiarity. Would Richard Greenberg's class- and gender-obsessed dramas ring as many bells with producers and audiences had William Inge not filled the stage with similar issues in the nineteen-fifties and sixties? And where would Paul Rudnick be without the well-made gags masquerading as plays which George S. Kaufman, with Edna Ferber or Moss Hart, and other polite drawing-room anarchists wrote in the thirties, in an effort to educate the populace? In general, our commercial theatre is less accepting of the new than of its opposite, nostalgia. And with that tendency come—for the playwright writing in the safety zone—certain rewards: more frequent productions, bigger budgets, larger audiences, and greater fame.



Portia as a military psychiatrist and McDermott as her patient in "The Treatment."

Although Eve Ensler, with her talk of vaginas, flabby stomachs, genocide, and, now, in "The Treatment" (opening the Culture Project's IMPACT Festival), government brainwashing and post-traumatic stress disorder, is often perceived as "radical," the fifty-three-year-old writer and performer has become her generation's Lillian Hellman. Ensler's intriguing, tender, and often tiresome work recalls not Hellman's psychologically astute and dramatically compelling "Toys in the Attic" (1960) period but her dull 1941 anti-Fascist melodrama "Watch on the Rhine." Ensler, who made her name in 1996, with the Obie Award-winning piece "The Vagina Monologues," mines the same self-important sense of social urgency and political regret as her predecessor. Even in her best work—"The Good Body" (2004), for instance—we have the playwright as warmhearted nag, intent on telling us where we have gone wrong. One suspects that if Ensler had nothing to complain about she would have nothing to say. She writes because life is filled with causes.

In "The Treatment," Ensler gives us the ravages of war. The play's battlefield is a grim office in which Man (Dylan McDermott), a war veteran, and Woman (Portia), a military psychiatrist, face off in a series of short scenes. At the start, Man confesses that it was his wife who insisted that he seek professional help. Troubled by nightmares and insomnia, by having survived a war that his nerves did not, Man is a jangle of indecision, a walking trauma, bruised by the indescribable destruction and the random use of force he has witnessed and taken part in. He is a self without an "I." As Woman draws him out with—at first—inquisitive reasonableness, Man assumes that she is also drawing closer to him, if only because he wants her to. McDermott's physical awkwardness and largely braying vocal tone are right for the part. He struts through the play's "No Exit" atmosphere like a boy playing at war. Gradually, though, Ensler makes it clear that Man's hypermasculinity is just another costume; his hairy chest is a pelt obscuring his uncertain heart. Man finds himself, in the course of several fairly predictable interviews, slowly becoming more attracted to Woman. He cannot resist her interest in finding out who he is, even as he makes her stand for something other than herself. At times, he treats her like a slattern whom he can conquer through brute force; at others, he collapses in her lap like a baby. (McDermott would make a fine Brick in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.")

Throughout, Portia responds to McDermott's intense energy and despair with stoicism. Woman cannot break

ROBERT RISKO

through her role—her buttoned-up reserve—because she has a job to do, for the military. Is Man a threat to national security? To her? But what is she? The Army has defined her. Even as Man locks his lips onto hers, she sways but does not bend. She possesses all the self-awareness that Man lacks. She cannot allow her sensuality to take precedence over her good sense. The love she offers is merely a strategy to get at the truth.

Despite the play's sometimes confused ideology, McDermott and Portia bring humanity to their roles. The show's able director, Leigh Silverman, doesn't ignore Ensler's self-evident message—that war destroys us in ways that we cannot name and may never be able to communicate—but neither does she let it stand in the way of the characters, who interest her, and occasionally us, with their morbid, earnest dance of death.

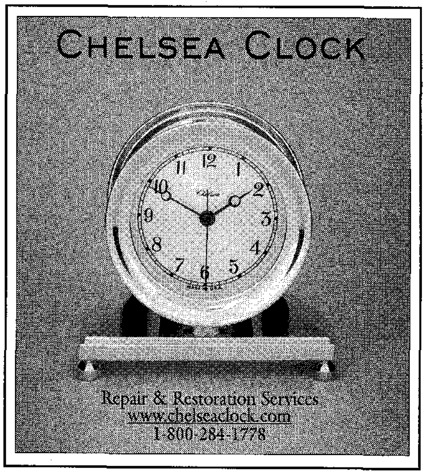
The fascinating story of Mary Todd Lincoln played out against a broad historical (and hysterical) background. Born to prosperous slave owners in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1818, Todd met her future husband—and the country's sixteenth President—when she moved to Illinois, in 1839. Married a few years later, Mrs. Lincoln was soon perceived as a political dragon lady, one of the nation's first. Accused of being a spendthrift during a time of national crisis—when she sought to refurbish the White House—and of having too much power in general, she was vilified by the press, as well as by one of her sons. Robert Lincoln resented his father's emotional remoteness, but, instead of confronting his near-mythic patriarch, he, like the rest of the country, criticized his astute mother, with stereotypical misogyny, for failing to fulfill her traditional role as a recipient—and receptacle—of male thoughts, desires, and feelings.

Mrs. Lincoln makes a strong dramatic character because her personal ambition—thwarted by the age of crinoline in which she lived—must be channelled through her husband and her children, even as she equals them in largeness of vision and understanding. In the seventies, Julie Harris brought a brittle intensity and naked intellection to the title character in James Prideaux's "The Last of Mrs. Lincoln," both onstage and in a film performance that is now, fortunately, available on DVD through the Broadway Theatre Archives. Prideaux's script and Harris's performance, both of which dig past the myths to create a historical present, remain the best evocation of Mary Todd Lincoln's time and her place in it.

This is despite the best efforts of June Bingham and Carmel Owen, who wrote the book and the music and lyrics, respectively, for the musical "Asylum: The Strange Case of Mary Lincoln" (at the York). "Asylum" is set in 1875, at the start of Mrs. Lincoln's stay at Bellevue Place, an asylum in Batavia, Illinois, where Robert has had her committed. Mrs. Lincoln (the fine Carolann Page) is a fifty-six-year-old widow, less baffled by her son's trespasses against her than she is rigid with moral outrage. Everything has been lost to her: husband, family, freedom. At Bellevue, Mrs. Lincoln is assigned a black nurse named Delia (Joy Lynn Matthews), who guides her charge through various visits, from, among others, a journalist, a doctor, and her son. It is Mrs. Lincoln's sisterly relationship to Delia that is the emotional center of the play. However, there is something rotten in this depiction of yet another understanding, strong black woman. When Mrs. Lincoln asks Delia to tell her about her background, Delia bursts into a gospel-inflected ode to the indomitability of the black female spirit:

My Mamma run from Georgia
I ran with her from Georgia
The road was long and dusty
We slept out in the rain
We made it through Kentucky
'Fore they sent us back again. . . .
Ma'am here I am
With you tonight
I'm workin' and I'm free
Workin' hard, but free
And Mamma lives in me.

Delia is, in a word, Maya Angelou—a spirited bird that's just gotta be free. Her songs and speeches are a giant cliché, one that's meant to congratulate the liberal mind-set of audiences who recognize Delia as goodness incarnate. This sanctimonious undercurrent coats "Asylum" with an oleo gleam; nothing approaching real life can ooze through it. ♦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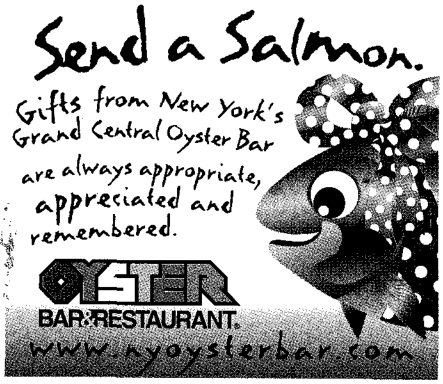
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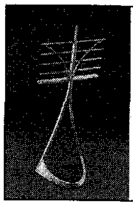
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MUSICAL EVENTS

FERVOR

Remembering Lorraine Hunt Lieberson.

BY ALEX ROSS

On the day before the Fourth of July, the mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson died of complications from breast cancer, at the age of fifty-two. News of her passing aroused little interest outside the classical-music world, since she was hardly a household name, and lacked even the intermittently twinkling, Sunday-morning-television stardom achieved by the likes of Renée Fleming and Yo-Yo Ma. She recorded infrequently in later years; she was shy about being interviewed; she had no press agent. Her fame consisted of an ever-widening swath of ardor and awe that she left in her wake whenever she sang. Among those who had been strongly affected by her work, there was a peculiarly intense kind of grief.

I was one of those people. In recent years, I found it hard to assume a pose of critical distance from this artist, even though I never got closer to her than Row H. In the days after she died, I tried to write about her, and failed. It felt wrong to call her "great" and "extraordinary," or to throw around diva-worship words like "goddess" and "immortal," because those words placed her on a pedestal, whereas the warmth in her voice always brought her close. Nonetheless, empty superlatives will have to do. She was the most remarkable singer I ever heard. She was incapable of giving a routine performance—I saw her twelve times, and each appearance had something explosively distinctive about it—and her career took the form of a continuous ascent. New Yorkers saw her for the final time last November, when she came to town with the Boston Symphony to perform "Neruda Songs," composed by her husband, Peter Lieberson. She sang that night with such undiminished power that it seemed as though she would be around forever. Then she was gone, leaving the apex vacant.

She was born Lorraine Hunt, in San Francisco, the daughter of two exacting Bay Area music teachers. She grew up studying piano, violin, and viola, settling on the viola as her main instrument. She made relatively few public appearances as a singer in her youth, but when she did she invariably caught people's attention. At a concert by the Oakland Youth Orchestra, in 1972, she stepped forward to deliver an aria from Saint-Saëns's "Samson and Delilah," and Charles Shere, in a perceptive review for the Oakland *Tribune*, described a now familiar spell being cast for perhaps the first time: "She simply stood there and sang, hardly even opening her mouth, with an even range, secure high notes, and marvelous control of dynamics in the swells."

By 1979, she was the principal violist of the Berkeley Symphony. When the orchestra decided to mount a production of "Hansel and Gretel" at San Quentin State Prison, she volunteered for the role of Hansel. Under these fittingly unconventional circumstances she made her operatic début. She took up singing full time while studying in Boston in the early eighties, drawing notice first for her precisely expressive accounts of Bach cantatas at Emmanuel Church and then for her work in radical opera productions, by Peter Sellars, of Handel's "Giulio Cesare in Egitto" and Mozart's "Don Giovanni." She rose to fame in Europe in the mid-nineties, mainly on the strength of an instantly legendary performance in Sellars's production of Handel's "Theodora" at the Glyndebourne Festival, in 1996. She made a belated Metropolitan Opera début in 1999, in John Harbison's "The Great Gatsby." The ovations that greeted her Dido in "Les Troyens" at the

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Lieberson in New York, October, 2003. Photograph by Richard Avedon.

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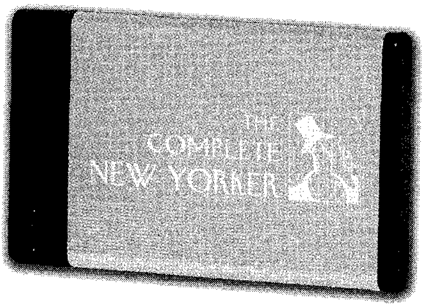

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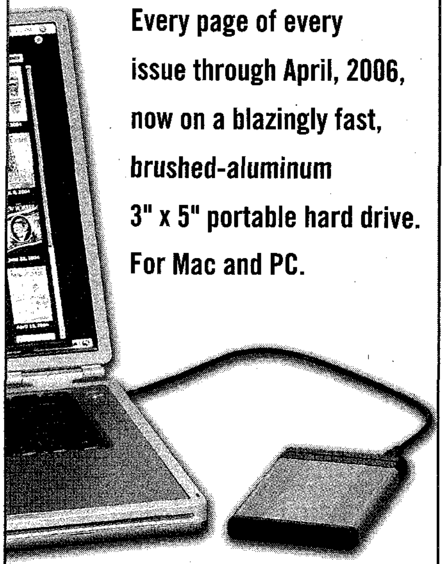

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Met, in 2003, signified her assumption of diva status.

"Lorraine's a bit of a nut," people in the music business used to say. They were referring to her Northern California nature—her spiritual pursuits, her interest in astrology, her enthusiasm for alternative medicine. She sometimes unnerved her colleagues with her raucous sense of humor and her braying laugh. In retrospect, her alleged eccentricities seem essential to the evolution of her art. She broke through the façade of cool professionalism that too often prevails in the classical world, showing the kind of unchecked fervor that is more often associated with the greatest pop, jazz, and gospel singers. She was often compared to Maria Callas, but she might have been a shade closer to Mahalia Jackson.

The voice was primally beautiful, rich in tone and true in pitch, warm and deep and wine-dark. It had a wonderful way of materializing from the instrumental background, as if from the ether. In "Ombra mai fù," from Handel's "Xerxes," the first note begins like an extra resonance around the strings. There was something calming and consoling about the mere fact of that sound. "Time itself stopped to listen," Richard Dyer wrote in his obituary for the Boston *Globe*. Central to the singer's repertory was a group of arias that I think of as her benedictions, her laying on of hands: "Ombra mai fù," with which she made an overpowering first impression on New York operagoers in City Opera's 1997 production of "Xerxes"; "As with rosy steps the morn," from "Theodora," which she made into an anthem of beatitude; Bach's "Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen," which, in an uncomfortably haunting Sellars staging, she sang while attired in a hospital gown; and the African-American spiritual "Deep River," her signature encore. Listening closely, you could hear how immaculately crafted these performances were. Their emotional transparency was rooted in the fact that each expressive inflection was joined seamlessly to the next.

Loveliness was only the point of departure. She could also communicate passion and pain and a fearsome kind of anger. Her Xerxes whipped around to deliver an up-against-the-wall tirade in "You are spiteful, perverse, and insulting." There was an apocalyptic quality to her rendition of "La Anunciación," her centerpiece aria in John Adams's Christmas oratorio, "El Niño." When she sang Britten's cantata "Phaedra" at the New York Philharmonic, she froze listeners in their seats with her high monotone chant of the words "I stand alone." And as Irene, a spiritual leader of the martyrdom-bound Christians in "Theodora," she made her voice into a kind of moral weapon. There is a DVD of the Glyndebourne "Theodora"—it is one of three essential recordings, the others being the Nonesuch CD of two Bach cantatas and the Avie CD of Handel arias—and the pivotal moment comes in the air "Bane of virtue, nurse of passions . . . Such is, prosperity, thy name." In other words, money kills the soul. The phrase "thy name" is sung eighteen times, and by the end the voice is seared around the edges, raised up like a flaming sword. Deployed in the right way, this sound could bring down a government.

Having run the gamut from angelic serenity to angelic wrath, this most complete of singers concluded her career with a very human demonstration of love. She met Peter Lieberson in the summer of 1997, on the occasion of the première of his opera "Ashoka's Dream," in Santa Fe. They fell in love and eventually married, and Lieberson began to write with his wife's voice in mind. By reputation a brilliant practitioner of twelve-tone technique, he had always had a secret yen for sensuous, late-Romantic harmony, and in "Neruda Songs," a recording of which is not yet available, that desire came rushing to the surface. This is some of the most unabashedly lyrical music that any American composer has produced since Gershwin. It is also courageously personal music, the choice of Neruda poems seeming to acknowledge the fragility of Lorraine's health. The final song, "Sonnet XCII," begins, heartbreakingly, with the words "My love, if I die and you don't—" The music is centered on a lullaby-like melody in G major, and it has the atmosphere of a motionless summer day. The vocal line ends on a B, and afterward the same note is held for two slow beats by the violas, as if they were holding the hand of the singer who came from their ranks. The composer is holding her hand, too. The last word is "Amor." ♦

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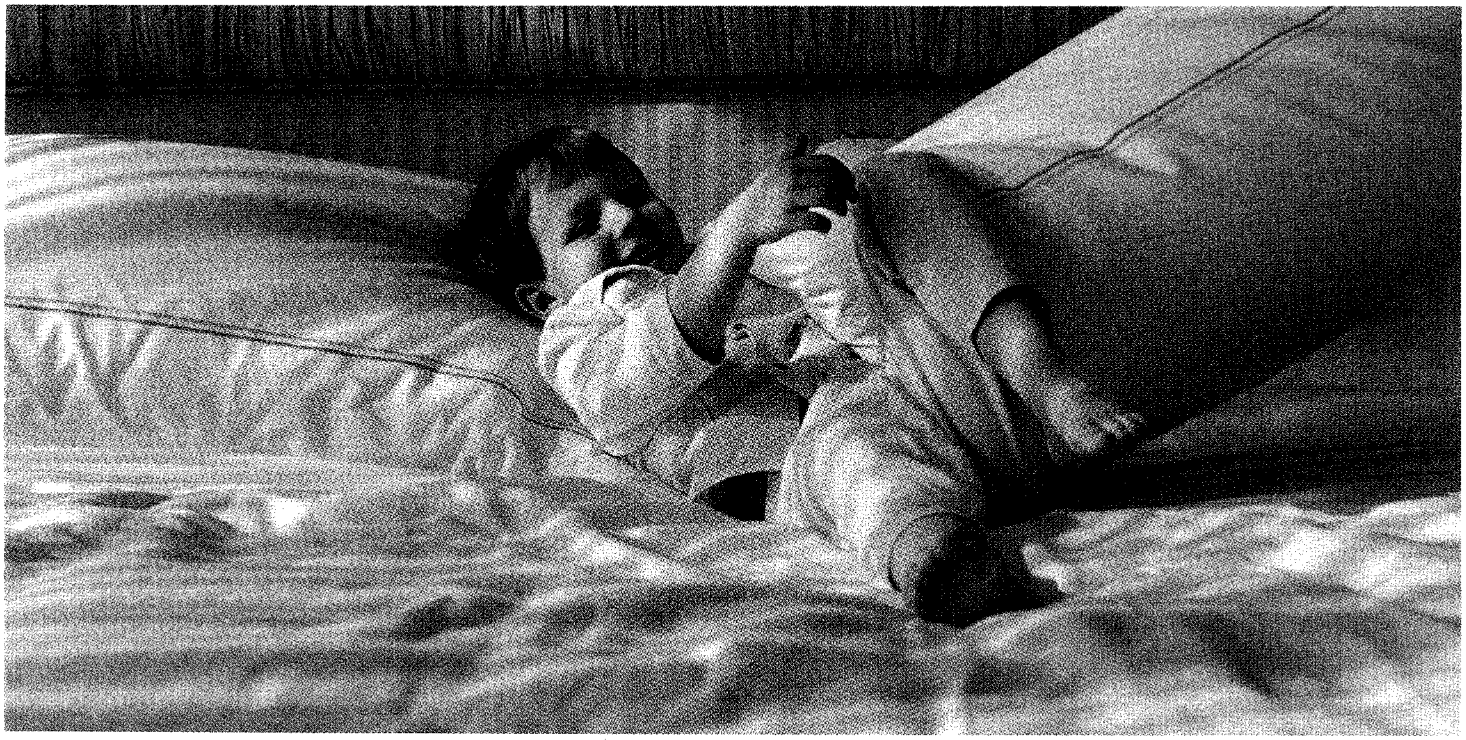

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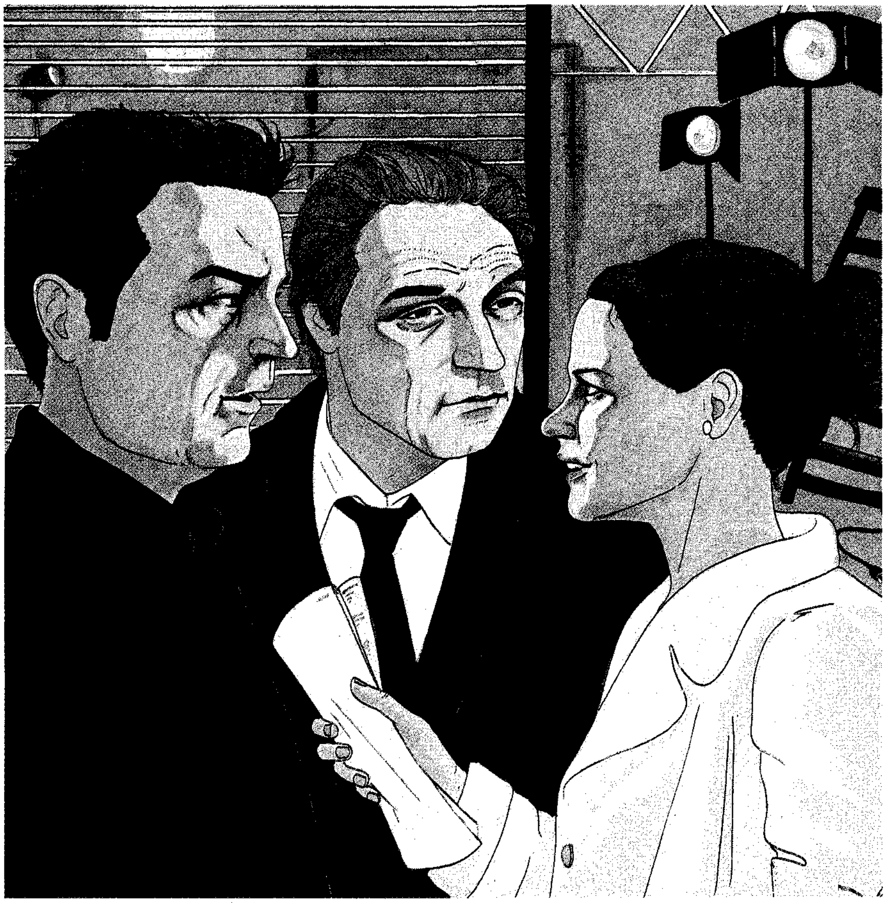
ON TELEVISION

BACKSTAGE ANGST

Aaron Sorkin returns to prime time.

BY TAD FRIEND

Aaron Sorkin must love television—only someone who loves it could savage the medium so. The first episode of his unfailingly enjoyable NBC drama, "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip," about the backstage maneuverings at a late-night comedy show, opens with the program's weary executive producer, Wes Mendell (Judd Hirsch, in a growling cameo), losing a battle with a censor at his network, NBS. When he is told that he can't run a sketch called "Crazy Christians," Wes snaps. He interrupts the live broadcast and tells viewers to switch off their sets. Observing that "people are having contests to see how much they can be like Donald Trump," and "we're eating worms for money," he declares that TV is "making us mean, it's making us bitchy, it's making us cheap punks—that's not who we are."



"Studio 60" stars Matthew Perry, Bradley Whitford, and Amanda Peet.

LARA TOMLIN

His unscheduled "Network" tribute gets him fired, of course, and sets in motion events that will convene Sorkin's glossy cast and frame the show's emerging tensions. It happens to be the first day at work for the network president, Jordan McDeere (Amanda Peet), but she's an unorthodox sort who agrees with Wes's assessment and is amused by the ensuing ruckus; that very night, she hires Matt Albie and Danny Tripp to restore the show—and her trashy, bottom-feeding network—to their bygone glory. Matt (Matthew Perry) and Danny (Bradley Whitford) are a prickly but talented creative team who worked at "Studio 60" before going on to success in films; they arrive over the objections of the NBS chairman, Jack Rudolph (Steven Weber, in a nifty turn as a corporate infighter), who, having forced the pair out once before, fears, correctly, that they will bring him nothing but grief.

Wes's jeremiad flatters NBC, which airs "The Apprentice," with Donald Trump, and also "Fear Factor," the worms-for-cash procedural, but which is also bringing us Sorkin's critique. More important, it flatters us: we're not cheap punks; we don't *really* watch all that high-rated crap, no sir. Sorkin charms us into tagging along as he sets out to re-create a golden-age-of-television atmosphere. His title winks at fifties shows such as "Studio One" and "77 Sunset Strip"; the second episode invokes the famous "You've got spunk" exchange in the pilot of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show"; and the entire enterprise is patently inspired by "Saturday Night Live."

Wes's speech also reminds us how heated and hyperbolic, how scripted, Sorkin's shows are; he had a hand in writing almost every episode of his sitcom "Sports Night" (I got to know him when I was reporting a piece on the show) and almost every episode of the first four seasons of "The West Wing." Sorkin's characters don't get into pickles in the usual TV ways: breaking the law to help a victim ("Law & Order: SVU"); obeying unseen voices ("Medium"; "Ghost Whisperer"); having sex with the wrong person ("Desperate Housewives"); or burying a goombah in a landfill ("The Sopranos"). They get into pickles because they mouth off—and it's great television because television prizes banter above all forms of conversation. Other shows' characters get mouthy (think of Dr. Gregory House on "House" or Ari Gold on "Entourage"), but Sorkin's spar and bluster like the flap-jawed hacks in "The Front Page." Jack Rudolph, when he wants to put Jordan in her place, barks, "I got news for you, sister." Sister! Can "toots" be far behind?

Jordan remains unruffled. Sorkin gives Amanda Peet a perfunctory foible—she gets people's names wrong—but he clearly wants us to adore her. It helps that Peet exudes cool-eyed mischief as a woman whose awareness of her colleagues' ill will only increases the wattage of her poise. When Jordan refuses to kill the "Crazy

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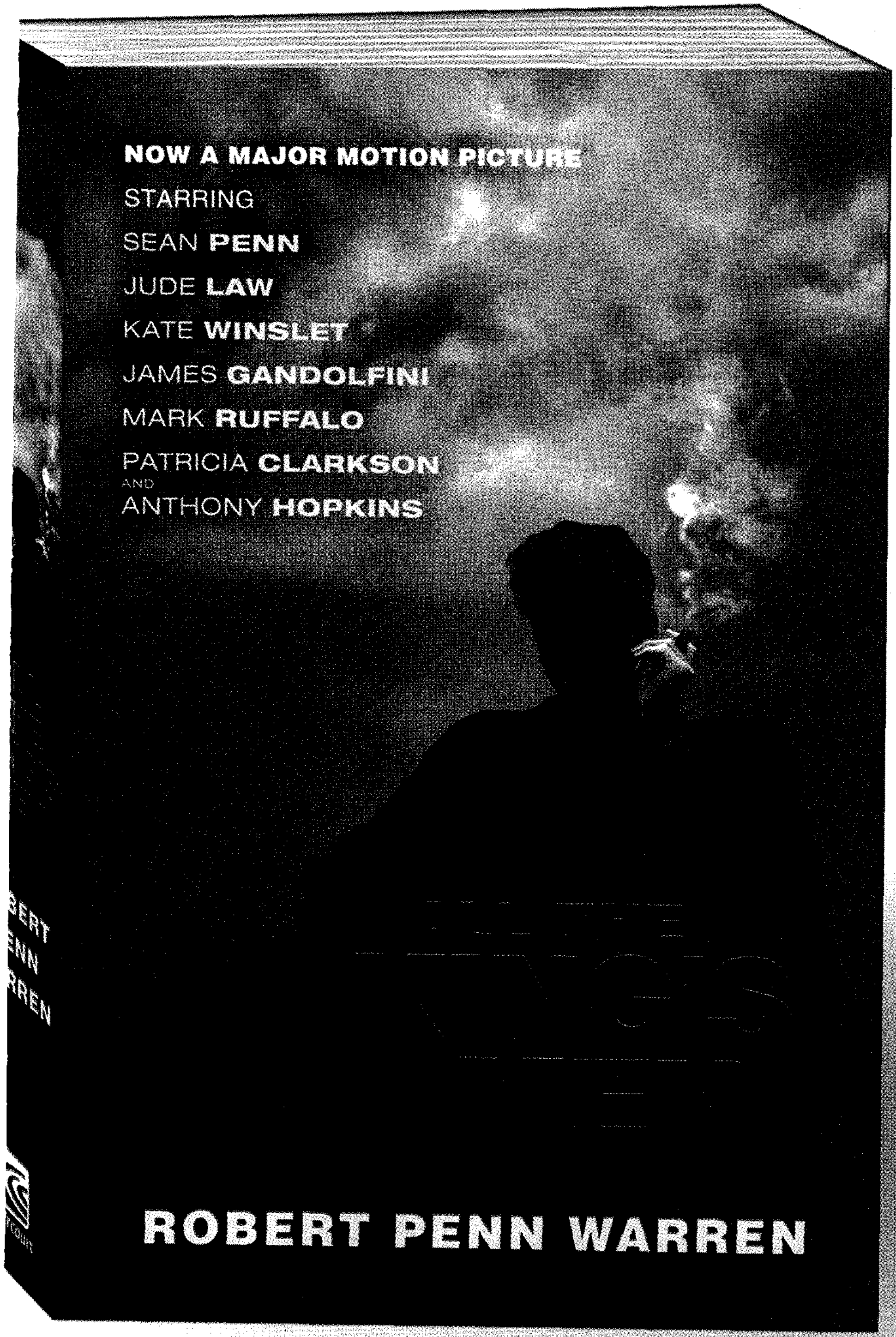
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Christians" sketch despite the threat of a fundamentalist boycott—"I made them a promise," she says of Matt and Danny—Jack looks at her incredulously, and we begin to wonder: could this supposed television executive be an escaped mental patient? No, just an appealingly counterfactual network president along the lines of "The West Wing" 's appealingly counterfactual President.

The "boys," as Jordan archly calls Matt and his best friend, Danny, are the heart of "Studio 60." Matthew Perry has one of television's most familiar faces, but the fecklessness that he sometimes exhibited on "Friends" has been replaced by a seamanlike weathering. Willing now to let the camera close to trace his anxieties, Perry is winning as an impulsive writer drawn back to the show—in part because he has unfinished business with his ex-girlfriend Harriet Hayes (Sarah Paulson), a Ketel Martini-drinking Christian who is one of the comedy program's stars, and in part out of loyalty to Danny. Bradley Whitford's Danny pretty much had to take the job, because he has just tested positive for cocaine use and can't get insured to direct movies. Whitford was rumpled and staunch as Josh Lyman, the deputy chief of staff on "The West Wing"; here he seems filled with a rage so deep it emerges as fatigue. Often he's hunched over like the coach of a losing team, but, wherever he is on the screen, our eyes are drawn to him. For all his watchful ministering to Matt's moods, Danny may be the first to blow.

On "Studio 60," no conversation is so delicate that it can't be held on the fly in a crowded hallway. Sorkin's longtime creative partner, the director Thomas Schlamme, revives "The West Wing" 's famous walk-and-talks; his Steadicam prowls down hallways and across the stage and above the length of the writers' conference table and even through a mullioned window, coiling itself around the colossal set and its squadrons of hurrying extras. We are always glimpsing, over shoulders and through doorways, the characters who will play the next scene, and at times watching "Studio 60" feels like rubbernecking an accident from the passing lane. But the A.D.D. camera style suits Sorkin's writing; his characters frequently jabber at someone who chooses that moment to look elsewhere.

In the second episode, Matt is complaining to Danny while Danny, half-listening, watches a closed-circuit feed of Jordan, who's in the next room handling questions from television critics prior to introducing her new show-runners. In less than sixty seconds, Sorkin establishes Matt's anxiety about not having enough time to retool the show; Matt and Danny's mutual contempt for their deputies; that Matt still has a crush on Harriet and is worried she'll find out that he's been sleeping with another cast member; that Wes's speech is now the leading topic on talk radio; and that Danny may have a crush on Jordan. A few minutes later, when Danny blurts out to the critics the real reason he's back—his cocaine use—we realize that he was inattentive backstage in part because he was girding himself to confess. This is terrifically economical stagecraft.

Yet Sorkin's dialogue falls on the ear better than it holds up to scrutiny. When Harriet asks Cal (Timothy Busfield), the director who kept Wes on the air, if he's O.K., he responds to her not as a friend but as a straight man:

> CAL: I've been told to sit tight and wait for word. . . .
>
> HARRIET: Word on what?
>
> CAL: I faced off with Standards during a live broadcast, Harry. The guys I know who've done that feel lucky when they can get a job directing "Good Morning, El Paso."

Similarly, when Jordan assures Danny that she'll keep the secret of his drug test, he scowls:

> DANNY: That's nice, but I have no reason to trust you and every reason not to.
>
> JORDAN: Why?
>
> DANNY: You work in television.

There's something rum about these people. In the pilot, Harriet tells Matt that their relationship turned sour after she went on "The 700 Club," and "you got cold and you got mean." In the second episode, after Harriet finds out about Matt and her fellow cast member, she tells him, "That's just mean." The scenes don't quite play. One problem is that Harriet is more a conceit than a character. A more serious issue is that meanness and stupidity are the worst things Sorkin's characters can think to accuse one another of. For all his sniping at Christian bigots, a hobbyhorse going back to the pilot of "The West Wing," his theology doesn't seem to encompass any shading of evil. As a result, his characters can feel like Pinocchios—motor-mouthed marionettes hoping to promote themselves to real live boys.

Here, as in his earlier shows, Sorkin's gang seems diverse and all-American and meritocratic, but it is really an aristocracy of talent; the characters repeatedly disdain the growing reach of the rabble. When the cast member Tom Jeter (Nathan Corddry) reads aloud a negative appraisal of the show from a blogger named Bernadette, his fellow-performer Simon Stiles (D. L. Hughley) asks, "Why do you care? She's got a freezer full of Jenny Craig and she's surrounded by her five cats." "The New York *Times* is going to quote Bernadette so that the people can be heard and the *Times* can demonstrate they're not the media élite," Tom says gloomily. "I prefer when they *were* élite."

When the network's executives meet to discuss the Wes situation and how to channel the passions it will stir up among that rabble, they gather around a table that looks very like the War Room circle in "Dr. Strangelove." But Sorkin isn't a satirist: he doesn't want to mock the suits so much as gain a seat at the table. We are meant to be impressed that hundreds of millions of dollars are at stake and by the array of concerns that routinely warp the creative impulse.

At the same time, these corporate sensitivities are useful as obstacles that Sorkin throws in the path of his writing proxy, Matt, who worries in the second episode, as airtime approaches, that he doesn't have a "cold open"—the show's first sketch, which has to strike a perfect note of historical awareness, contrition, and impudence. I won't spoil the spare-no-expense solution that he and Danny and the cast finally come up with, except to say that Matt, beginning the search for sets and costumes, asks, "What do we have that says 'Legacy of Television'?" Most writers would fade out there. Why risk bombing with the actual sketch, thereby eroding our belief in the characters' talents? But Sorkin lets his majestic production number roll, and the gamble pays off. He more than convinces us that Matt (read: Sorkin) could run "Studio 60" or, for that matter, "Saturday Night Live." The show handsomely succeeds in creating that golden-age feeling; it is entertainment—with all that the word suggests, and doesn't—of the highest order. ♦

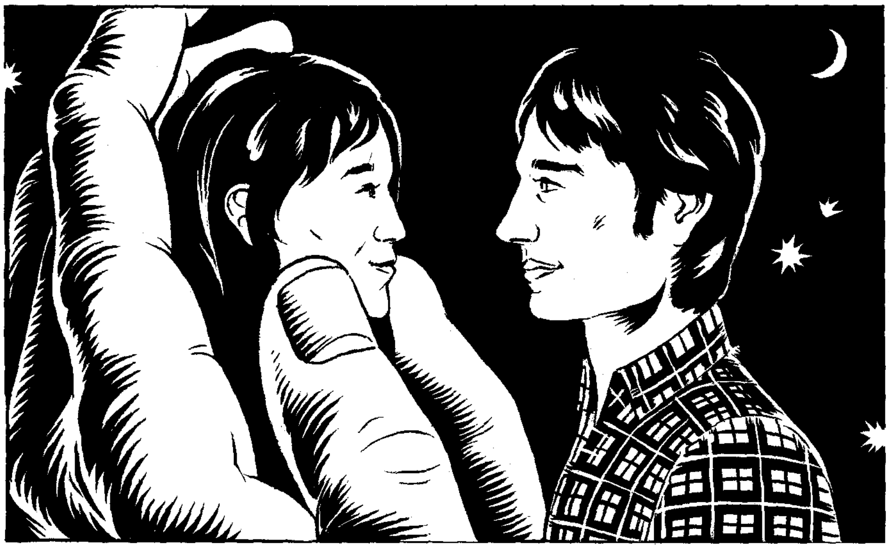
THE CURRENT CINEMA

DREAM ON

"The Science of Sleep" and "Renaissance."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Of the many things not to expect from Michel Gondry—the man behind "Human Nature" and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"—the most obvious is a clear linear narrative. Given that he is unable, or at any rate fiercely unwilling, to tell a story straight, one wonders how the director copes with the rest of life. How on earth does he make a cup of coffee? Does he grind the water, boil the beans, and gently spew the whole thing back into the pot?

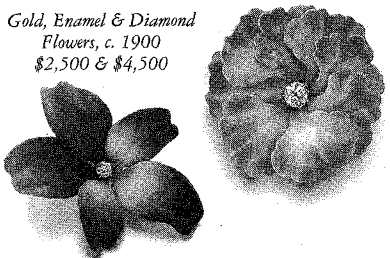


Charlotte Gainsbourg and Gael García Bernal in Michel Gondry's new movie.

GRANT SHAFFER

The excitable fragmentation that has built up throughout his work now explodes in "The Science of Sleep," a multilingual burst of English, Spanish, and French. It stars Gael García Bernal as Stéphane, a young Mexican who, following the death of his father, has been called to Paris by his French mother (Miou-Miou). In an effort to impose regularity on his existence, she gets him a job designing promotional calendars. "I glue paper in a basement all day," he complains, and signals his scorn by drawing *his* kind of calendar—exploding airplane for June, earthquake for August, and so forth, each month marked by a fresh catastrophe. This got a laugh when I saw the movie, and you buy the gag because of the absurd, irreproachable innocence of the character, yet it gestures toward a more worrying innocence in Gondry himself: how ruinous would an event—or an emotion—have to be before he considered it as anything other than an opportunity for play?

What Stéphane really wants to do is invent, and to this end he constructs a number of brightly colored, wire-sprouting gizmos, which—to the surprise of everyone but himself—actually work. I was particularly taken by the time-stopper, which emits a little flash and drags the user back a couple of seconds, so that his or her immediate experience is repeated. (It could be a director's second take, or a projection glitch; "The Science of Sleep" is partly a movie about the deep desire to have life behave more like a movie.) The device is obviously related to the memory-wiper in "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," the difference being that, whereas that one was used to peel two lovers apart, this one helps to paste two friends together. Stéphane has a new



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neighbor, the tellingly named Stéphanie (Charlotte Gainsbourg), whom he first encounters when he helps to haul her piano upstairs. Needless to say, it tumbles back down—a cacophonous echo of Laurel and Hardy in "The Music Box," another tribute to fond exasperation.

Stéphanie is our hero's dream girl, meaning that she capers through his dreams. At the start of the film, he demonstrates how to make dreams, literally mixing the ingredients—yearnings, daily occurrences, a heaped spoonful of memory, and so on—into a steaming pot. He stirs and gibbers like a TV chef, performing in a cardboard studio of his own imagining; his recipe for dreaming, in other words, is all part of a dream from which he will have to wake up. From here on, ordinary conversations keep slipping a gear into reverie, as Stéphane suddenly finds himself gliding through back-projected skies or bathing in water made from cellophane. These shifts are skillfully done, and Gondry's animations are endearingly cheapjack, but there is something willed and chronic in his need to flee, at every turn, into the wondrous. Filmmakers with more patience discovered long ago that to sit in the dark and watch a movie is itself a species of dreaming, and that a tentative love story, say, can seem quite unreal enough—"Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again"—without having extra fantasies forced upon it. Gondry, who sharpened his talents on music videos, has no time for such meditative airs, and he makes Stéphane's dreaming as silly and scattershot as possible, so as to rebuke the stolidity of the mature world.

> The sheer size too, the excessive abundance, scale, and exaggeration of dreams could be an infantile characteristic. The most ardent wish of children is to grow up and get as big a share of everything as the grown-ups; they are hard to satisfy; do not know the meaning of "enough."

That is Freud, in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900). It is a book that stood on the threshold of the movies, and the gravity of its claims ("There are no trivial initiators of dreams, and thus no innocuous dreams," Freud says) has not just provoked filmmakers but, as it were, sorted out the adults from the kids. Some of the adults, like Buster Keaton, did their most graceful work in the least solemn of genres (no one has improved on the dreamscape of his "Sherlock, Jr."), whereas the kids, as if playing at being grownups, have always tried to flavor their immaturity with something perverse—George Lucas with his grandiosity, Terry Gilliam and Tim Burton with their thirst for the grotesque, and now Michel Gondry with his sweet naïveté. In this case, he is abetted by Gael García Bernal, a good sport who couldn't be unappealing if he tried. To watch him sprout a pair of giant foam-rubber hands may well be the last word in postmodernism, but from where I was sitting it looked more like an outtake from an old Monkees show. "The Science of Sleep" is a frantic and funny diversion, but it pales and tires before its time is up. It doesn't know the meaning of enough.

Thanks to the riches with which new technology continues to embarrass the movie industry, a growing number of films announce themselves as neither live-action nor animation but as something wrought and trip-like in between. Anyone who has staggered out of "Sin City," or requested a set of fresh eyeballs after watching Richard Linklater's "Waking Life" and "A Scanner Darkly," will realize that this no man's land is turning out to be dangerously fertile. Take Motion Capture, whereby an actor, draped with a network of responsive markers along the body, performs a series of choreographed movements, which are plotted on a computer and then laminated with layers of additional detail. The master of this strategy is Peter Jackson, who created Gollum and King Kong, the latter verging so closely on hyperrealism (the hair, the creased skin, the grumpy snort of the nostrils) that it wound up shedding the magic of the original beast. But what happens if you head in the other direction—if you treat the skeletal coördinates of Motion Capture as a starting point for the stylized? The result, it would seem, is "Renaissance."

The place is Paris and the year is 2054, by which time even Jacques Chirac has left office. Power resides in the hands of a company named Avalon, whose billboards, advertising a mixture of comfort and threat ("We're on your side, for life"), loom over the frightened city. It is plainly Paris, but the quays rise as if on stilts above the Seine, suggesting that half the river has drained or boiled away, while the feet of the Eiffel Tower are planted on a glass piazza, so that pedestrians below can glance upward and, to all appearances, watch their fellow-citizens walk on air. It is a treacherous landscape in which to follow a lead, but such is the task facing Karas, a tight-voiced policeman. He must find a young woman named Ilona, an Avalon employee who has been kidnapped under cover of night, and his only weapons are a gun, a hunch, and a beautiful sister: the essential armory of the B-movie cop. Anyone weaned on the shadowy conspiracies of film noir will shrug at the plot of "Renaissance," but the lack of novelty is deliberate; it is the shadows themselves that have changed.

As far as I can gather, the main concern of the director, Christian Volckman, is to forge a true black-and-white movie: black, white, and nothing else—no surreptitious grays, no fogs of indecision. The characters, too, are carved out with alarming physical clarity, as though Volckman had thrown aside his pioneering software and picked up a printer's woodblock. If there is a sense of mismatch here, it rises from the coupling of body and head; because of Motion Capture, Karas and the women stalk through the film with feline ease, but their features are so whittled as to be inexpressive—sometimes no more than a few slashed lines for cheekbones, collarbones, nose, and mouth. The hands tell us more than the faces, which is good news for anyone writing a paper on the influence of Rodin in world cinema, but which also suggests a cumbersome journey ahead for Volckman and his ilk: how far can any strain of film progress when it struggles to chart the flow of feeling on an individual face?

Despite those worries, "Renaissance" is certainly one of the year's more luscious releases, offering not just the sleekest car chase but the most romantic of rainstorms. The characters' voices are provided by Daniel Craig, Catherine McCormack, Jonathan Pryce, and others: fine speakers all, although they tend to be smothered by the sort of higher cheesiness which sounds so much better in French. We are told, for instance, that when Ilona disappeared she was working on "the protocol for immortality." To us, that sounds both ponderous and daft, whereas for any self-respecting Parisienne it clearly refers to a new and madly desirable brand of face cream. Of course! *Now* I get it. Ilona is the Avalon Lady, and Karas (whose own name sounds like a male fragrance) must find her in time for the launch of a new line. Case closed. ♦

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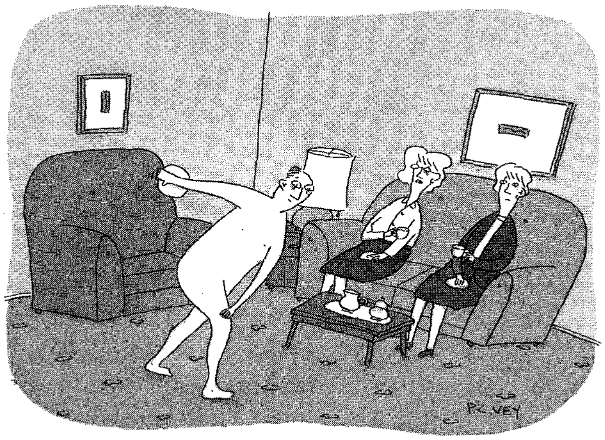
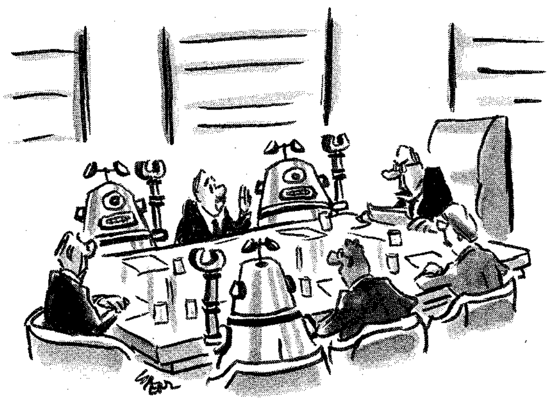
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, September 24th. Finalists in the September 11th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 9th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"We have company, Henry. Use the good china."
Jay Shuck, Minneapolis, Minn.



THE FINALISTS

"You're voting with your pacemaker again, Hargrove!"
David Gilbert, Middleburg, Fla.

"Jenkins, if I want another yes-man I'll build one."
Brent Sheppard, Morganton, N.C.

"They're programmed to be idiots, Higgins. What's your excuse?"
Brendan Gibbons, New York City

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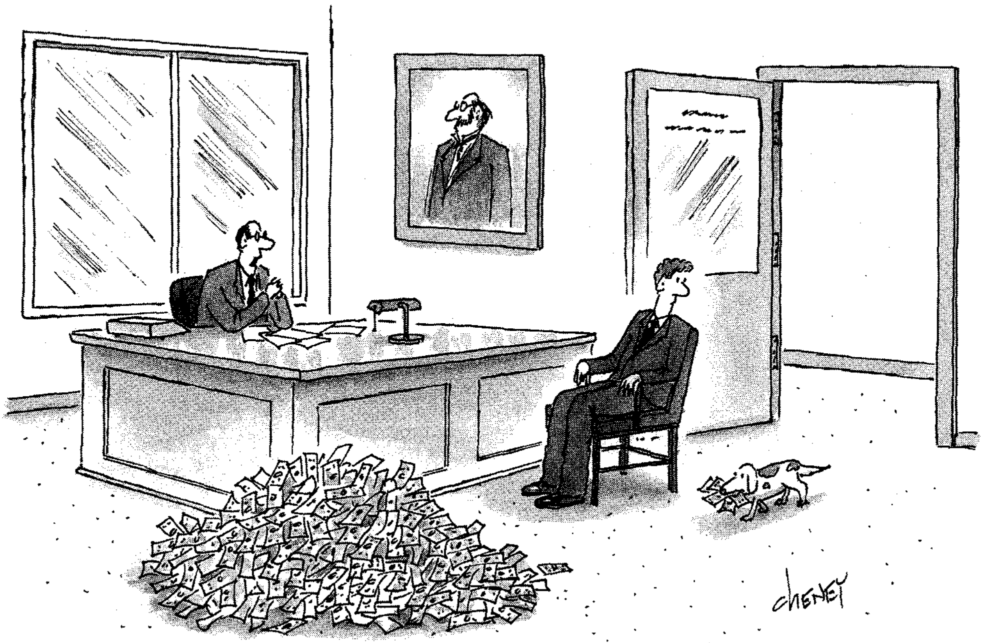

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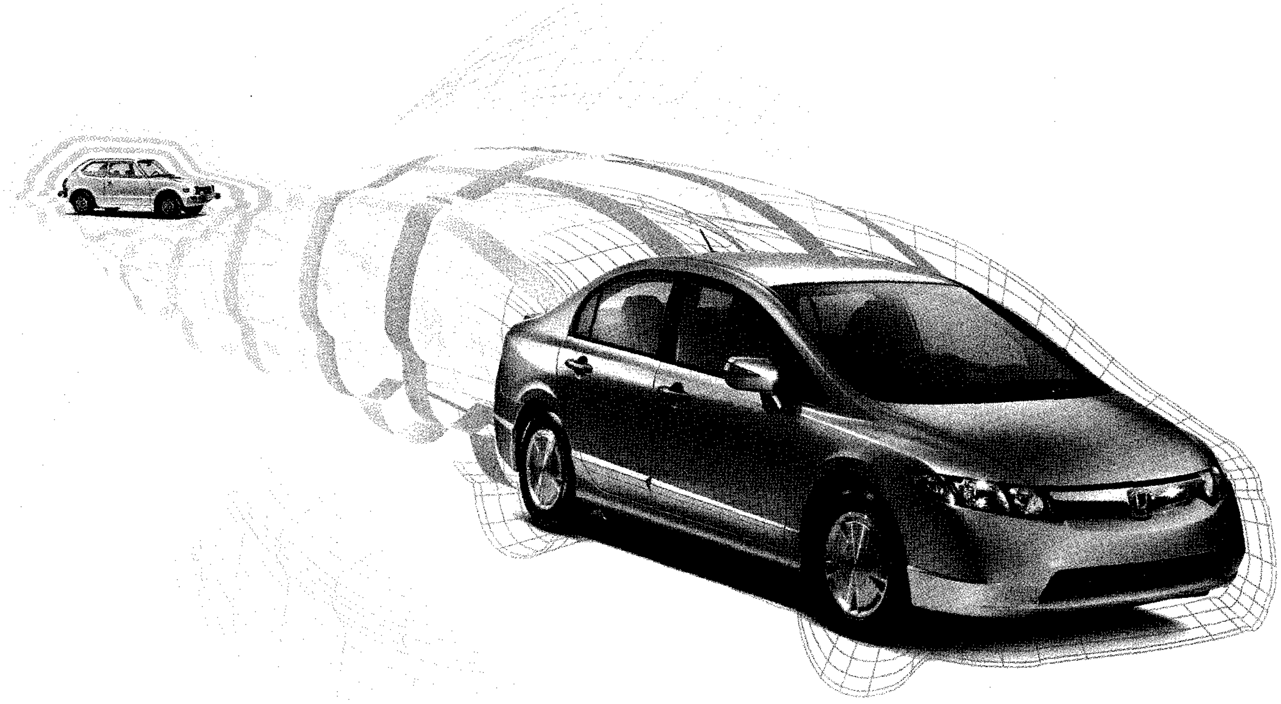

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